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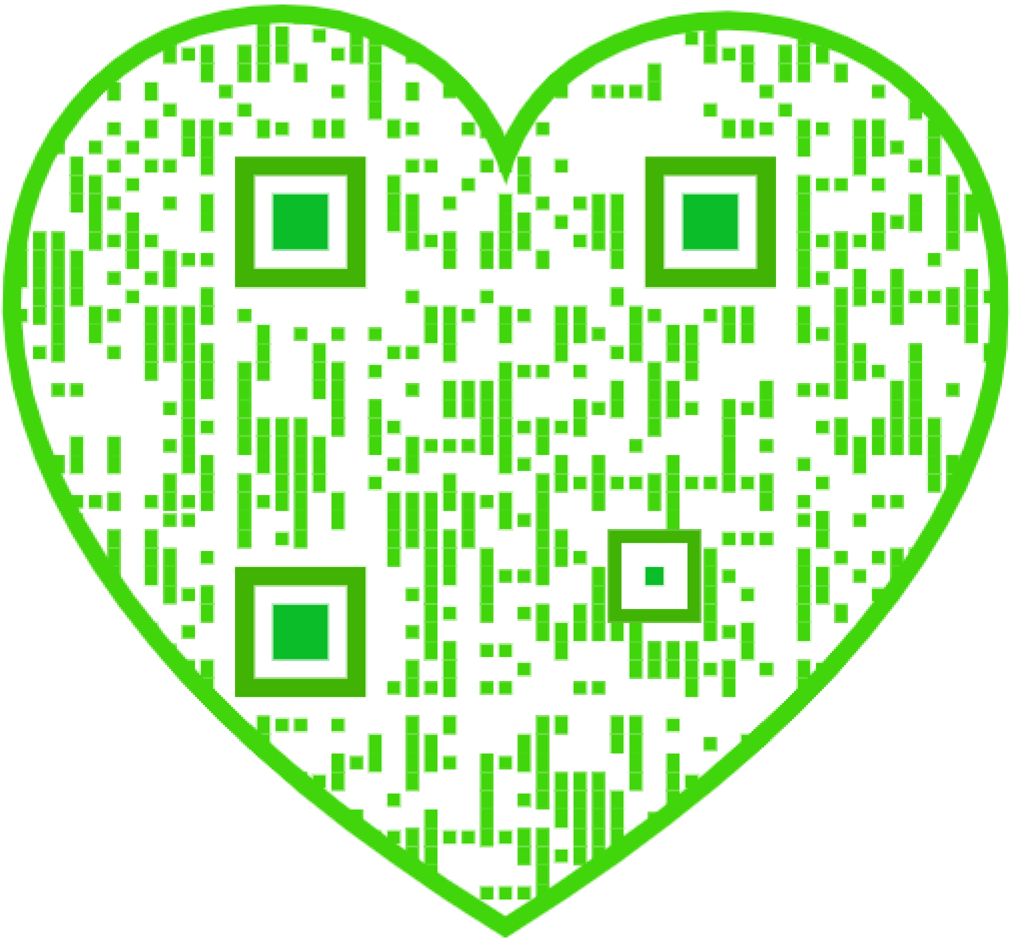
- Why pianist Myra Hess was more than a WWII hero
- How Sibelius crafted beauty from personal turmoil



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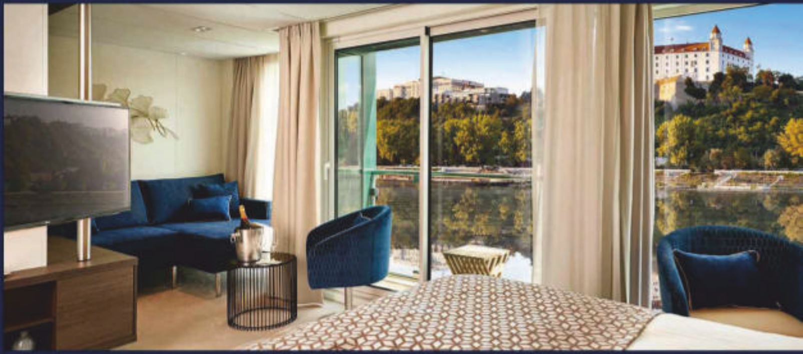

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Welcome

This month, as modern-day Europe scrambles to rearm, we mark 80 years since VE Day – the Allies' formal acceptance of Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945. The battles of World War II extended far beyond tanks and bullets, of course, as those on both sides sought to win hearts and minds.

For the British, music was seen as an essential means of boosting morale. And crucially, as Rob Ainsley writes on page 24, 'Nothing was compulsory, nor were "enemy" composers banned.' In this atmosphere of permissiveness, a flowering of British composition produced works as varied as Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony, Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

The Nazi propaganda machine, on the other hand, was 'more ruthlessly xenophobic', as Erik Levi writes on page 30. Works by Jewish composers and those with a modernist streak were banned in favour of composers embodying so-called Aryan virtues, with the touring Berlin Philharmonic an important political asset.

That music of all descriptions flourished in such dark days is an encouraging thought – and testament to the power of the arts to survive destructive ideologies. For those looking for just such solace, turn to page 58 for an exciting and colourful array of music-making around the world in our Summer Festival Guide.

Charlotte Smith *Editor*

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Rob Ainsley

Music and travel writer

'Along with British Library trips and author interviews, my research into the music of WWII Britain involved watching several films with a period-witness source who has unprintably funny opinions on them: my 91-year-old mum...' ***Page 24***

Erik Levi

Music professor and writer

'Perennially fascinating for me is the degree to which the Nazi propaganda machine harnessed classical music as a potent cultural weapon for softening up populations in the countries occupied during wartime.' ***Page 30***

Jessica Duchen

Journalist, author and librettist

'Myra Hess became a national heroine for her National Gallery concerts in World War II. Writing my new biography of her, though, I've been discovering the real Myra: complex, idealistic and indomitable, just for a start...' ***Page 36***

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Subscriptions £64.87 (UK); £65 (Europe); £74 (Rest of World) ABC Reg No. 3122

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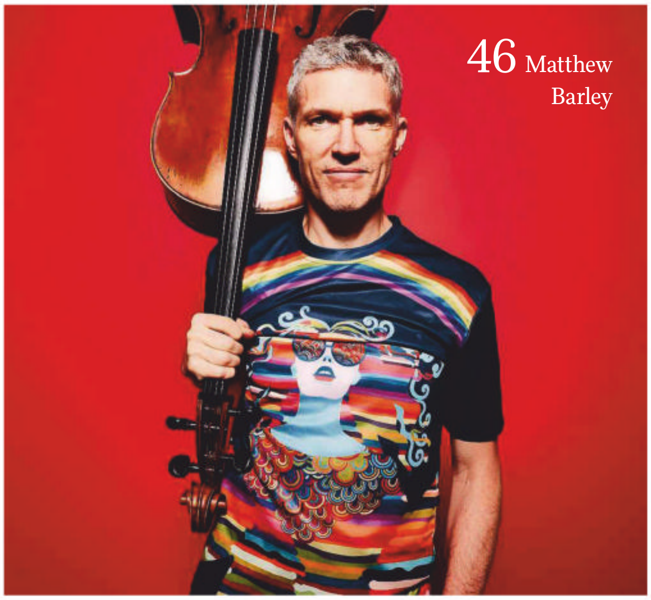

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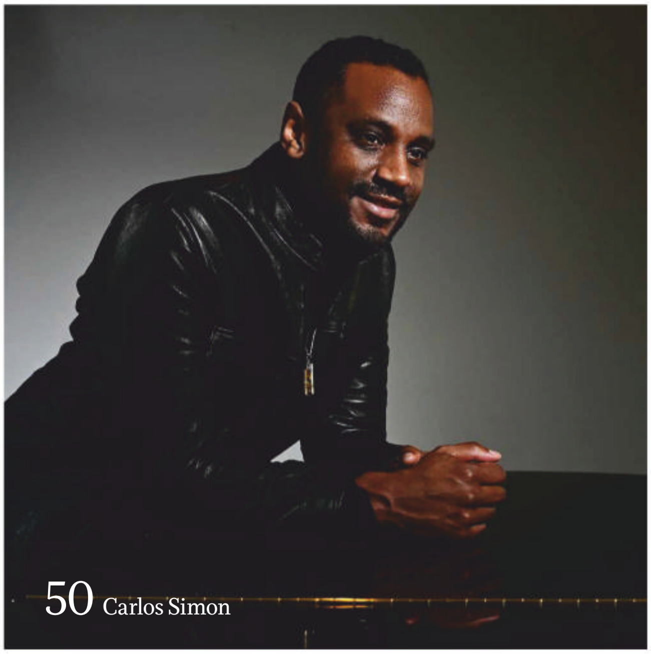

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May reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings and books

The Jerusalem Quartet performs Shostakovich

112 Recording of the Month

Shostakovich
String Quartets Nos 2, 7 & 10
'The Jerusalem Quartet combines amazing technical finesse with overwhelming musical insight'

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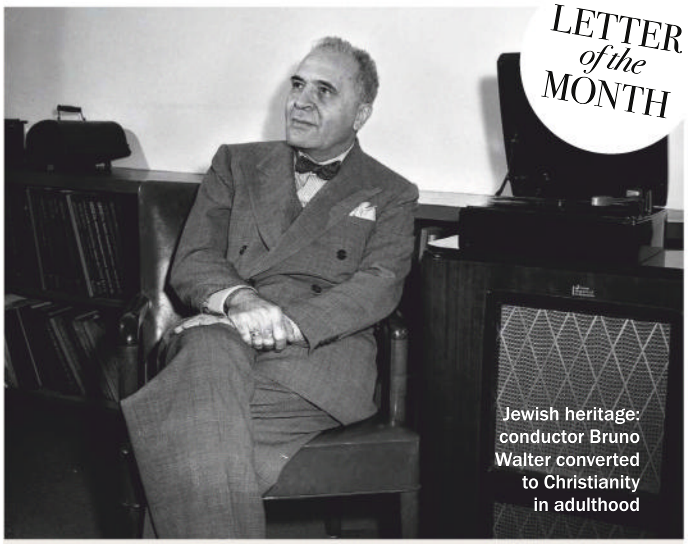
LETTER *of the* MONTH



Jewish heritage: conductor Bruno Walter converted to Christianity in adulthood

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From Schlesinger to Walter

I was surprised to read in Andrew Green's February article on Wilhelm Furtwängler's relations with the Nazis (*Puppet of the Reich?*) that Bruno Walter was not Jewish. In fact, he was born into a Jewish family in Berlin in 1876 but changed his surname from Schlesinger to Walter when appointed chief conductor at the municipal opera in Breslau – it was claimed by the theatre's director that the name Schlesinger (literally 'Silesian') was too common, but the true objection may have been that it was also a common Jewish surname. In 1898, he converted to Christianity after being appointed as chief conductor to the Riga Opera. Perhaps this is where the misapprehension crept in? As it happens, Otto Klemperer was born in Breslau to Jewish parents and became a practising Roman Catholic. His family name was changed from Klopper in the late-18th century in response to the Austrian emperor's decree aiming to assimilate Jews.

Linda Edmondson, *Westbury, Shropshire*

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Teaching notes

I enjoyed and agreed with Richard Morrison's central point in his April column ('Engaging with classical music takes work – and it's not elitist to say so'). I am not a musician and, sadly, took no music theory classes at university, but Richard mentions that there are many books that would help the interested listener appreciate such matters as sonata form etc. I have found in my attempts to learn musical structures that text alone rarely, if ever, serves to deepen appreciation. Reading coupled with narrated audio demonstrations of the subject addressed often enlightens more, as I find when listening to Joshua Weilerstein's wonderful *Sticky Notes* podcast, though even this leaves this listener with the sense that one has still not fully understood the deeper structures and recurring/recapitulated but transformed themes. My question is: what books combined with audio demonstrations would Richard recommend to those of us willing to put in the work required for deeper listening?

Bill Perkins, *Rochester, MN, US*

Member of the bored

I share Ariane Todes's guilt at feeling momentarily bored in classical concerts (*Out of focus*, April). Particularly when I was young, I would feel idiotic for not understanding Boulez, or even bits of Brahms, and frantically try to conceal my boredom. It can still be easy to feel intimated by this 'serious' artform and that 'the composer is always right'. However, as long as we are concentrating, we cannot change our fundamental emotional reactions to music and are quite entitled to hold them. The plain-speaking William Walton agreed. Listening to a rehearsal of his First Symphony, he leaned over to his companion. 'You know, those eight bars mean nothing,' he said. 'Pure passagework. Means nothing!'

James Dixon, *Stanningfield*

Beethoven walk out

I have not been able to attend a classical concert in five years, due to the effects of a stroke and subsequent diagnosis of epilepsy risk. However, how much I miss the opportunity to be able to go to them. In response to your very interesting *Out of focus* article, my mind rarely wanders at concerts, unless I am distracted by behaviour of other members of the audience. In over 20 years, I have only walked out early once, in protest at a dreadful performance of Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony – the funeral march was so bad, I feared I might not survive the concert if I stayed to the end – and a friend who was with me agreed entirely with the decision. I have never

fallen asleep at a concert, though I will admit to yawning – largely a result of a full day in the office rather than boredom!
Ian Malvern, *Malvern Link*

First of Fourth

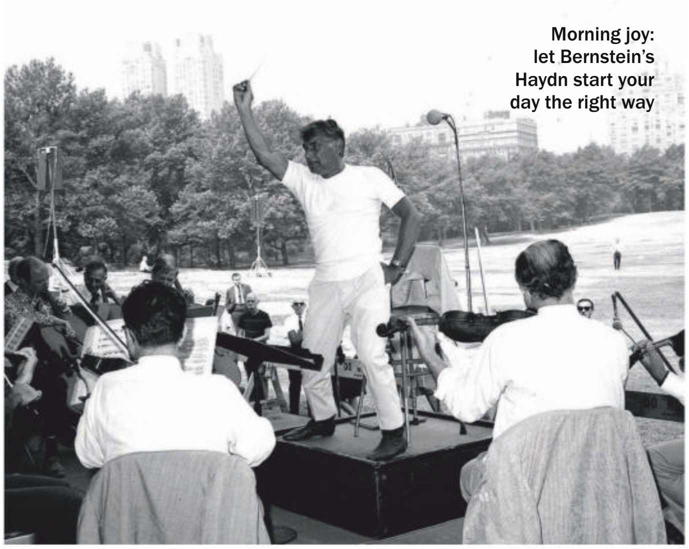
I often wonder what it must have been like to be in the Theater an der Wien on 22 December 1808, when Beethoven played the first bars of his Fourth Piano Concerto. Until then, concertos had started with an orchestral introduction, but this time Beethoven broke with tradition and the piano played first. It must have been a stunning moment and surely worthy of inclusion in your April *In the beginning...* article.
Elizabeth Balsom, *London*

Left-hand man

Your CDs that accompany the magazine each month are alone almost worth the price of a subscription. Not only is the music varied but, apparently, the editor of the CDs presumably has an uncanny insight into the life of the readers. I am writing this letter with my left hand only, as my right arm is immobilised following extensive right shoulder surgery. On the very day of my operation, the CD that was enclosed with your March issue contained Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand! Coincidence?
Søren Mikkelsen,
Odense, Denmark

Bear it and grin

I wonder whether your readers or reviewers have a favourite piece of music with which to start the day, knowing it will make them smile or feel better able to face things ahead and even, just for a few minutes, give them the glad feeling that all is momentarily right with the world. Mine would be Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic in the final movement of Haydn's Symphony No 82, 'The Bear'. Never fails.
Neil Sinyard, *Doddington*



Morning joy: let Bernstein's Haydn start your day the right way

The editor replies:
So long as it is accompanied by a cup of coffee, Schubert's Third Symphony does the trick nicely here. Any others...?

Wrong drum

Alexandra Wilson's review of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* (March) appears to be confusing it with Verdi, in mentioning a hitherto-unknown bass drum part: 'fearsome crescendos underpinned by sinister bass drum rolls'. I suspect this is news to the timpanist of the Bergen Philharmonic playing in the Chandos recording. Or am I wrong?
Kim Sargeant, *High Wycombe*

Inaugural insult

I was enjoying your January issue until I came to the *Star-Spangled Bangers* article. It started out well, describing happy and interesting facts about American inaugurals; but then, at the end, what a jolt to find a negative description of President Trump's first inaugural. Of all of the elements of such events, you chose to mention only those that seem rude and unnecessary, especially when you quoted Charlotte Church. You mentioned a few others who refused to perform – that no other inauguration has ever had that happen is preposterous and unfounded. Here was someone, not well known to many people in America, judging a person she did not know personally, but you chose her words to remain in your pages. To balance it, you had nothing positive to say about Trump as you did for the others. President Trump was not and is not a tyrant. Please refrain from bringing such things into your magazine. They serve no purpose but as an unwelcome insult to the head of a country, chosen overwhelmingly by the American people.
Suzanne Wallace,
Annandale, VA, US

Momentous years

Selecting a hallmark premiere year back in time (Richard Morrison, January; and Letters, February) is a creative, even educating pastime. I have selected two consecutive years – 1945 and '46. Despite World War II and its aftermath, these two years were quite productive. The two salient works were Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, a memorial to the now destroyed country the composer once knew and loved; and, quite different but no less grim at times, Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Other war-inspired music premiered in 1946 includes Honegger's *Symphonie Liturgique*, with the warlike march rhythm of the 'Dona nobis pacem' final movement; Hindemith's oratorio *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, a memorial to Franklin D Roosevelt that sets Walt Whitman's 1865 poetic response to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; and Milhaud's Third Symphony, subtitled 'Te Deum', celebrating the Allied victory. Also premiering the same year were Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements, Tippett's String Quartet No. 3, Strauss's Oboe Concerto in D, Barber's Cello Concerto, Bliss's *Adam Zero*, Villa-Lobos's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Copland's Third Symphony. The previous year gave us the premieres of Moeran's dark Cello Concerto; Bartók's Third Piano Concerto, a surprisingly lyrical work, antithetic to either the world's condition or Bartók's health at the time; Martinů's Fourth Symphony; Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony, a contradictory light work after the tortures and anguish of the Seventh and Eighth; and Korngold's Violin Concerto, a Romantic flashback, as if the war had never happened.
James D Maffett,
Lakeland, Florida, US

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British music in World War II

KEEP CALM AND COMPOSE

British composers played a vital role in lifting spirits in World War II, sometimes in unlikely ways. Rob Ainsley tells how they played their part with symphonies, film scores... and jam

VE DAY 80th ANNIVERSARY

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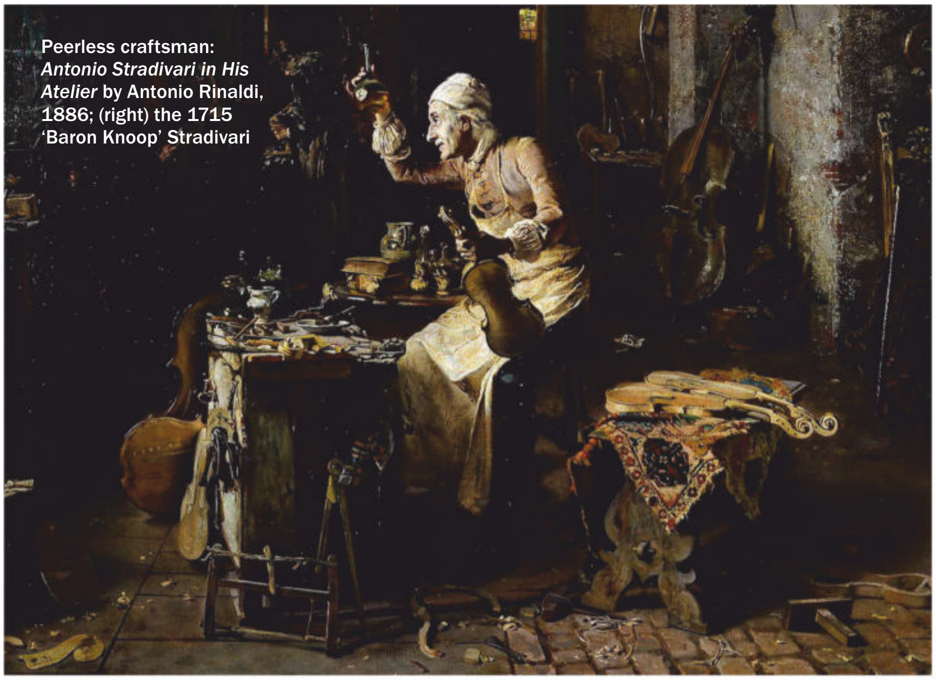

Peerless craftsman: ***Antonio Stradivari in His Atelier*** **by Antonio Rinaldi, 1886; (right) the 1715 'Baron Knoop' Stradivari**

Record price for a violin shattered

'Baron Knoop' Stradivari sells for $23m to private buyer

The record for the most expensive violin ever sold has been shattered, with the 1715 'Baron Knoop' Stradivari changing hands for $23m (£17.8m) in March. Though the name of the purchaser has not been revealed, the instrument was sold by the American collector David L Fulton, who himself had bought it in February 1992 for $2.75 million.

Made during what is often called luthier Antonio Stradivari's 'Golden Period' and featuring a striking two-piece maple back, adorned with a broad, elegantly marked figure, the 'Baron Knoop' has been described by Fulton as 'easy to play and I've never heard a better-sounding violin'. 'Perhaps some are as good,' he told *The Strad* in 2022; 'perhaps some have remarkable personalities, but none is better. It is a very happy-sounding fiddle.'

When Fulton first acquired it, however, the instrument was covered in French polish and varnish, leaving it a deep orange-red colour. It took three months to remove those layers, revealing the original varnish.

> 'I've never heard a better-sounding violin. It is a very happy-sounding fiddle'

The purchase sees Stradivari return to the top spot after 12 years of playing second fiddle to Guarneri. In 2013, the 1741 'Vieuxtemps' Guarneri 'del Gesù' took the record for the world's most expensive violin when it was sold for a sum said to exceed $16m (£10.5m) to, again, an undisclosed private buyer. The 'Vieuxtemps' remains on lifetime loan to the violinist Anne Akiko Meyers. Before the recent sale of the 'Baron Knoop', the most expensive Stradivari ever bought was the 1721 'Lady Blunt', which sold for $15.9m (£10.4m) in New York City in 2011.

Names such as 'Baron Knoop' and 'Lady Blunt' may sound like Gilbert and Sullivan characters, but they were real people. Born in 1846 in Moscow, Baron Johann Knoop had a collection that at one point included 29 violins, violas and cellos. Fulton himself has told *The Strad* that, like him, the Baron was an enthusiastic amateur violinist and that the 1715 'Baron Knoop' was his favourite instrument to play. The '1715', incidentally, is important, as there is more than one Stradivari named after him.

Fulton's own collection, meanwhile, once included 27 instruments, but most have either now been sold or become part of the David and Amy Fulton Foundation. The sole violin that Fulton himself now plays is a 1698 Peter of Mantua Guarneri, the instrument with which he first began the collection. 'This creates a pleasing symmetry and arc for the collection saga,' he tells *The Violin Channel*; 'it began with my "Little Petrus" and is ending with my "Little Petrus", and there's been a ton of amazing stuff in between.'

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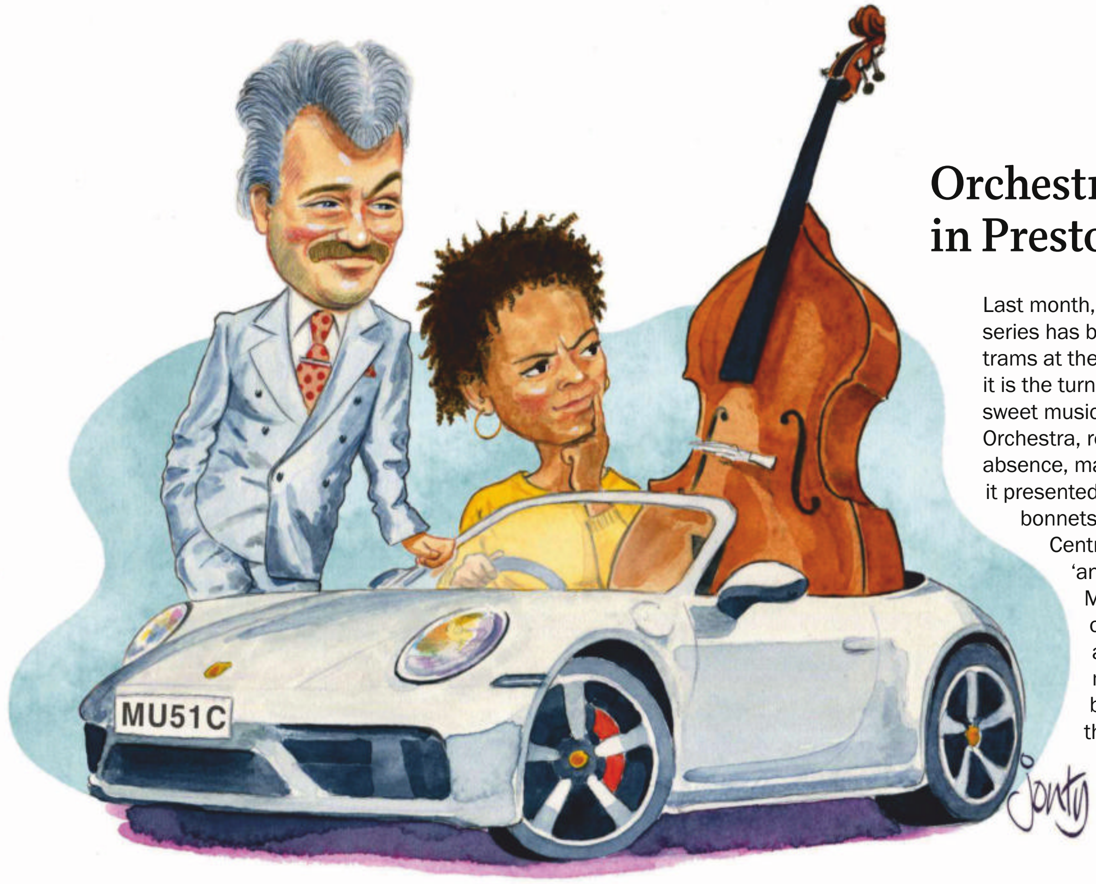

Orchestra puts the *presto* in Preston car showroom

Last month, we reported how a new concert series has been launched among the buses and trams at the London Transport Museum. Now it is the turn of luxury cars to be serenaded by sweet music – in March, the Preston Symphony Orchestra, recently relaunched after a 50-year absence, made a stylish return to the stage when it presented a candlelit concert amid the gleaming bonnets and plush leather interiors at Porsche Centre Preston. Describing the event as 'an unforgettable evening', the Centre's MD Tom Fox reflected that 'seeing the orchestra perform among our cars in a candlelit setting was a truly special moment'. Perhaps he might have been hoping one or two players might themselves have their heads turned by said motors? That said, squeezing a double bass into, say, a 911 Carrera could prove a tough ask...

Veteran bassist brings Oscar joy

Music was in the air at the 97th Academy Awards, not just for the composers and songwriters taking home Oscars for their cinematic efforts, but also the American double bassist Orin O'Brien. The (now) 89 year-old is the subject of *The Only Girl in the Orchestra*, a Netflix film directed by Molly O'Brien (Orin's niece) that won the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Film at the ceremony in March.

Orin O'Brien made headlines in 1966 when she joined the full-time ranks of the New York Philharmonic, the first woman to do so. She took the (unwanted) attention in her stride, though, focusing on the job at hand, and it's one she maintained for 55 years. The film, which finds the musician about to retire in 2021, is a candid portrait of a woman who doesn't see herself as an artist or any kind of inspiration. Many would argue with her on both counts (as her niece does on camera), and it is moving to watch O'Brien facing up to a different pace of life as she moves to a smaller apartment and says goodbye to some of her beloved instruments. Her life is no less full, however, with a diary full of concerts to see, friends to catch up with and students to teach.

It is the latest in a line of classical music winners in this category, following the Oscars for *The Last Repair Shop* (2023), *Joe's Violin* (2016) and *The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life* (2013).

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Documentary delight: director Molly O'Brien collects her Oscar; (below) with her aunt, New York double bassist Orin O'Brien

No blues, as Saint Louis thinks big

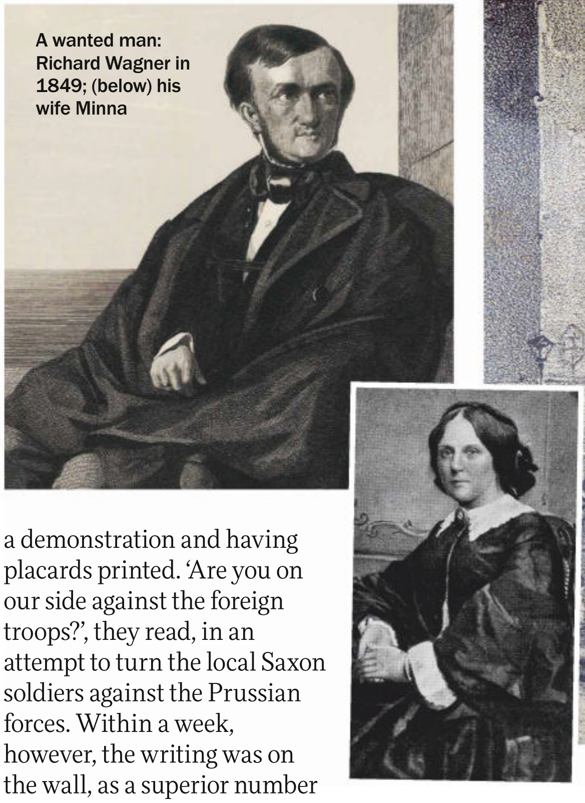
OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS

Big things are being planned in Missouri. Though it is still early days, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL) has announced ambitions to build a brand new performing arts centre that will incorporate an opera house. OTSL is looking into purchasing land formerly occupied by the headquarters of the Caceres shoe company in downtown Clayton – if all goes ahead, it will be able to move from its present Loretto-Hilton Center home at Webster University, whose iffy acoustics have been a regular target of criticism. Helping to fund such a grand scheme is a recent bequest of $45m from philanthropist Phyllis Brissenden – the largest in OTSL's history, it more than doubled the company's endowment.

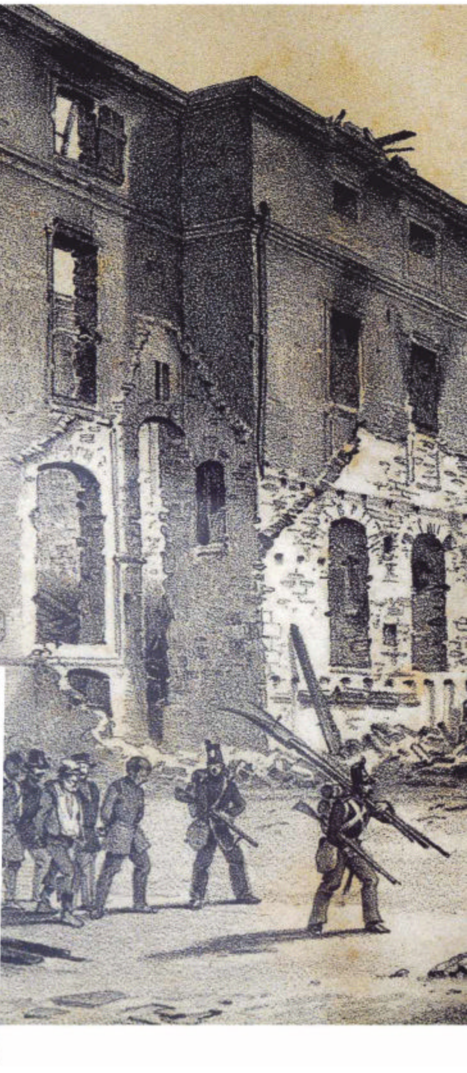
TIMEPIECE This month in history

MAY 1849

Wagner the revolutionary flees Dresden to avoid arrest



A wanted man: Richard Wagner in 1849; (below) his wife Minna



'The Royal Kapellmeister Richard Wagner is wanted for examination on account of his active participation in the recent rising here, but as yet he has not been found'. Thus ran a warrant published in a Dresden newspaper on 19 May 1849, empowering the local police force to hunt down and capture the fugitive composer. Wagner was 120 miles away from Dresden at the time, staying with his friend Franz Liszt in Weimar. 'Wagner is of middle height, has brown hair, and wears glasses,' the warrant continued. 'Well, that applies to a lot of people!', the German composer reputedly retorted.

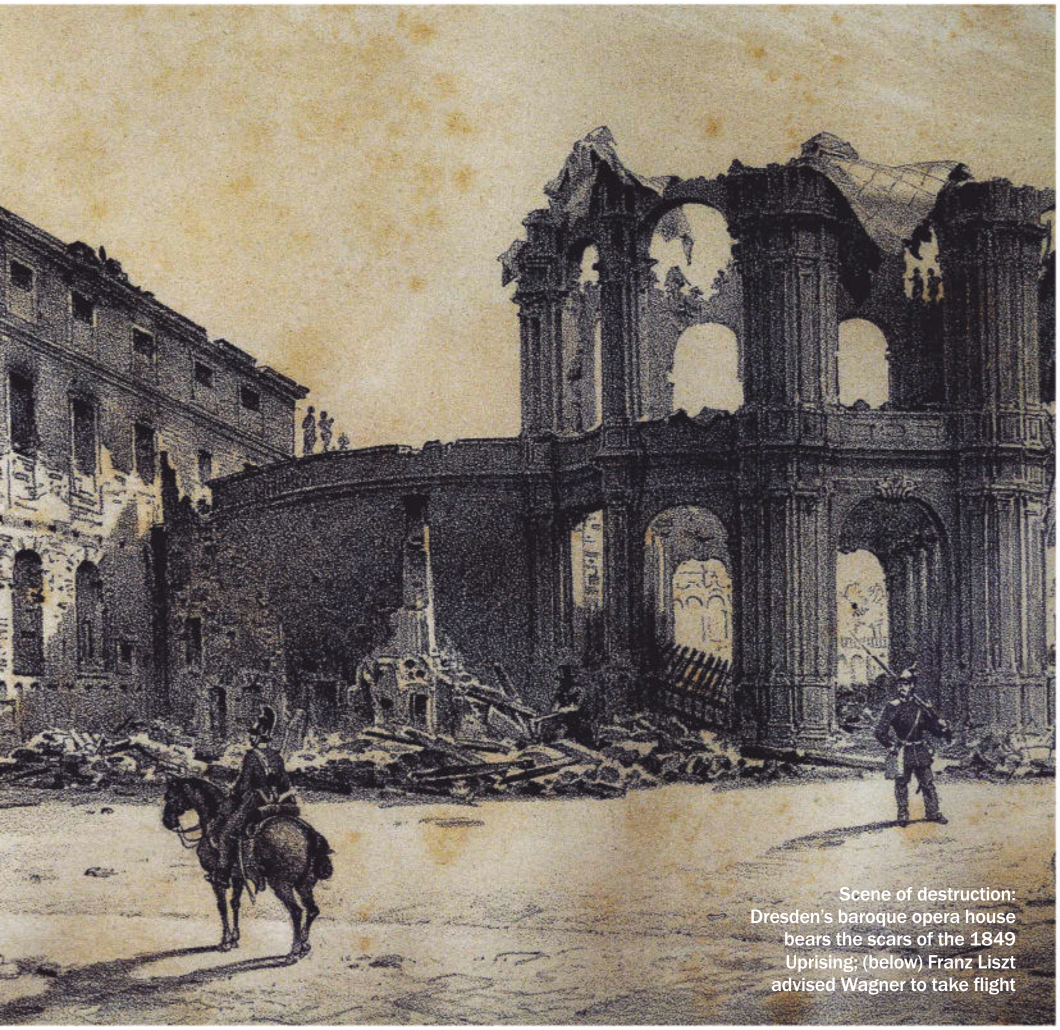
Joking aside, his situation was undoubtedly serious. Wagner had indeed been extensively involved in the May Uprising in Dresden, one of the last in a wave of violent insurrections sweeping Europe in the 1848-9 period. Sympathetic to the left-wing revolutionaries aiming to unite the 39 separate German states into a single constitutional democracy, he wrote articles inciting citizens to revolt, distributed hand grenades and monitored the action from the tower of the Dresden Kreuzkirche. While there, he (typically) engaged in an 'earnest philosophical discussion' with a schoolmaster and sent a note to his wife Minna requesting 'some necessary provisions'. Elsewhere, eyewitnesses reported seeing Wagner manning barricades, handling a gun and mingling with his fellow revolutionaries as the street-fighting against Saxon and Prussian troops unfolded.

Wagner himself was curiously diffident in his later memories of this tumultuous period, perhaps anxious to mask his full involvement. Initially attracted, he claimed, 'by surprise and interest in the drama, without feeling any desire to join the ranks of the combatants', by his own admission he was soon organising a demonstration and having placards printed. 'Are you on our side against the foreign troops?', they read, in an attempt to turn the local Saxon soldiers against the Prussian forces. Within a week, however, the writing was on the wall, as a superior number of government soldiers – around 5,000 – gradually subjugated the 3,000 insurgents.

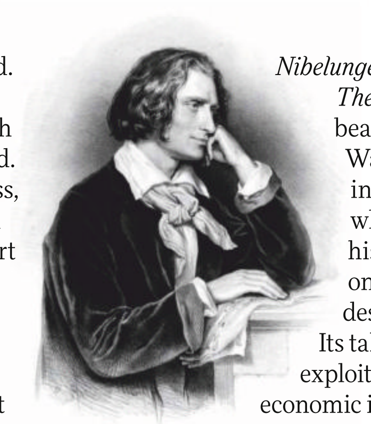
Wagner distributed hand grenades and monitored the action from a tower

Arrests of those involved in the Uprising began, and Wagner quickly transported his wife Minna, their dog Peps and a pet parrot to his married sister's house in Chemnitz, 60 miles away. Returning to Dresden, he witnessed the final collapse of the Uprising before attempting to return to Chemnitz. This, though, was impossible. Wagner had, it seemed, 'been seen in close association with the revolutionaries', and would face arrest if he lingered in the city. And so he went to Liszt in Weimar, 'where I had originally planned to spend my holidays', as Wagner later wrote, with ripe if unintentional irony. Now, however, he was a wanted man, and worried how the eminent Liszt might react to his situation. 'I found it very difficult to confess that I had not left Dresden in the regulation way for a conductor of the royal opera,' he wrote sheepishly in his autobiography.

Though Wagner mused disingenuously on his precise legal situation – 'Had I done anything criminal in the eye of the law or not?', he wondered – Liszt had no doubt that the composer should immediately flee the German territories, avoiding arrest and potential imprisonment. Taking coaches, and leaving Minna behind, Wagner made the 300-mile journey from Weimar to Lindau in Bavaria. There, on 28 May 1849, he caught a steamer across Lake Constance



Scene of destruction: Dresden's baroque opera house bears the scars of the 1849 Uprising; (below) Franz Liszt advised Wagner to take flight



to Rorschach in Switzerland. He was travelling, illegally, on a friend's passport, which fortunately went undetected.

Though initially penniless, Wagner now experienced 'a level of freedom and comfort that I had never enjoyed before'. After sojourning briefly in Paris, he sought a 'place of refuge' in Zurich, where he stayed for the next nine years. Minna eventually joined him, but their relationship was terminally fractured, and Wagner had several affairs in the 1850s. Despite ongoing emotional turbulence (or because of it), he was also highly productive, writing essays including 'The Artwork of the Future', and beginning compositional work on both *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Tristan und Isolde*.

The Ring in particular would bear the heavy imprint of Wagner's involvement in the May Uprising, which served to clarify his evolving thoughts on the organisation and destiny of human society. Its tale of greed, cruelty, exploitation, lovelessness and economic inequality had been starkly foreshadowed in the embattled streets of Dresden, where for a short period a revolution in the social order seemed possible. *The Ring* was about the continuing need for such a revolution – 'so that the people of the revolution might understand, in the noblest sense, its real significance'. ***Terry Blain***

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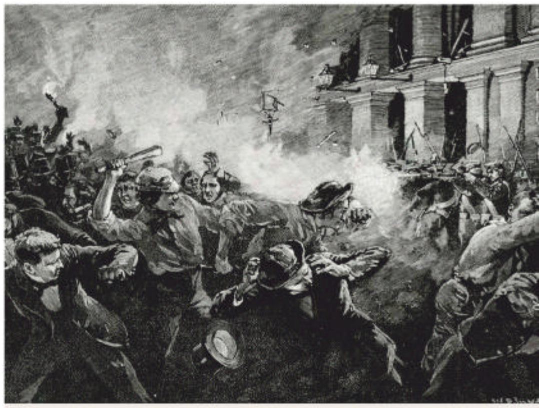


Shakespearean feud: the Astor Place Riot

Also in May 1849...

10th: The rivalry between two leading Shakespearean actors, the American Edwin Forrest and the British William Macready, leads to violence when Forrest's supporters disrupt Macready's performance as Macbeth at New York's Astor Opera House. More than 20 people are killed in the subsequent **Astor Place Riot** when soldiers fire on crowds that have gathered outside the building.

11th: The German composer **Otto Nicolai** dies of a stroke in Berlin. His death, at the age of 38, comes just two days after his appointment as director of music at the Berlin Staatsoper and two months after the premiere of his most successful opera, the Shakespeare-inspired *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. His other works include six further operas, two symphonies and a handful of chamber and vocal works.

21st: Led by General Artúr Görgei, the Hungarian revolutionary army takes **Buda Castle** by force, liberating the cities of Buda and Pest from the Austrian Empire. The capture leads to the Hungarian government returning to Buda from its temporary base in Debrecen, though joy will prove short-lived, as Russian intervention on Austria's behalf soon brings the revolution to an end.

27th: The Great Hall at London's **Euston Station** is opened to the public for the first time. Built on an impressive scale, the Philip Hardwick-designed building's features include a double flight of stairs, a coffered ceiling and eight statues representing the stops served by the northbound line. Oil paintings and glass cases containing models of locomotives complete the opulent feel.

31st: Danish forces defeat a Prussian army at the **Skirmish of Århus**, a few miles north of the city of Aarhus, thus preventing Prussia from continuing its advance through the peninsula of Jutland. The Skirmish is the latest episode in the First Schleswig War, being fought since March 1848 over control of the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg.

Music to my ears

Wonder woman: double bassist Orin O'Brien

The *BBC Music Magazine* team's current favourites…

Charlotte Smith *Editor*
A weekend of remarkably sunny weather was the perfect opportunity for a walk along the Thames, ending in an afternoon drink in a pub garden, where a plucky robin serenaded us with his impressively loud voice. The soundtrack to my walk was **Delius**'s *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* – a warm 1997 recording by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Neville Marriner. Alas, no cuckoos on the river – but plenty of geese, ducks and coots!

Jeremy Pound *Deputy editor*
Though my attempts to make her the subject of a question in this month's quiz (see p144) didn't quite work, **Sarah Walker**'s Sunday morning programme on Radio 3 is a weekend favourite, usually as I am driving Pound Jnr to and from pole vault training. Recently, John Williams's *Superman* theme proved an apt mood-setter for the athletic adventures ahead, while I was then brought gently back down to earth by Bach's sublime Flute Sonata BWV 1033.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*
I loved the Oscar-winning documentary *The Only Girl in the Orchestra* about US double bassist **Orin O'Brien**. What a fascinating artist – though being seen as 'fascinating' or an 'artist' seems the last thing the 89 year-old wants! O'Brien joined the New York Philharmonic in 1966 and the film finds her on the cusp of retirement, but no less passionate about making music and teaching the next generation. A must see, albeit all too short.

Steve Wright *Content producer*
Ask me my favourite **Vaughan Williams** symphony and I'll give you one of about six different answers. Currently, though, I'm plumping non-negotiably for the Sixth. It's a riveting affair, with its tense, often explosive opening *Allegro* followed by that eerie second movement, caustic *Scherzo* and the mysterious *Epilogue* that fades into (apocalyptic?) silence. Among many fine Sixths, I'm gripped by Antonio Pappano's 2021 recording with the LSO.

Trust your instincts: Iestyn Davies made musical memories in Hamburg; (opposite) Robin Ticciati with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe

Concert Heaven
Concert Hell

Top artists recall their best and worst performances

THIS MONTH
Iestyn Davies *Countertenor*

CONCERT HEAVEN

Handel Arias
Iestyn Davies (countertenor); Chamber Orchestra of Europe/Robin Ticciati
Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg (Jan 2025)
They always say you're only as good as your last performance, and this is not really about me, because as a singer it's so subjective and about the experience. I've just been on tour with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Robin Ticciati, and we did a programme of Handel and Mozart – I did some arias and at the end of the second half they did Symphony No. 35, 'Haffner'. We started in Berlin at the Philharmonie and the next day we went to the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg; then we went to the Salzburg Mozart Festival and finally ended up in Gstaad.

Just to stand in front of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe was incredible – modern players on modern instruments, playing Handel like no Baroque orchestra I've worked with. But it also was those beautiful halls in Germany, completely sold out, that made the experience so special. I'm just not used to the feeling of singing in a hall like the

Elbphilharmonie and having all those people in the audience enthusiastically bring us back three times for applause – even before the interval.

It was such a wonderful moment: I don't know whether I deserved this huge appreciation or not, but the enjoyment factor on stage was immense and the seasoned orchestral players said it was one of their favourite programmes. It was like a dream.

I've known Robin since university but I've really only worked with him once, because we don't often cross repertoire. But we all made this incredible performance happen – and I think that's not to be taken for granted, because it says a lot about the intuitive nature and professionalism of the players, and the musicality of the conductor.

When I first started performing, I dreamt of doing exactly what I've just done this week. Then it happens, and you think, 'Oh I'm in it now; this is it!'

CONCERT HELL

Handel Arias

Iestyn Davies (countertenor), Thomas Dunford (lute); Jupiter Ensemble
Edinburgh Festival (August 2023)

I did a tour of Handel oratorio arias which was climaxing at the Edinburgh Festival with the Jupiter Ensemble led by Thomas Dunford on the lute. We did some great concerts and had done a performance two weeks previously in York. I got to Edinburgh on the Saturday, started to feel a scratch in my throat and messaged my agent. They reassured me, 'I'm sure it'll be fine,' and the festival said, 'I'm sure it'll be fine.' I didn't sing at the Sunday rehearsal but went back to my room and did what all singers do, which is sing through the entire programme on my own – it was probably one of the best performances I'd ever given to my pillow. I smugly thought, 'Great!', got into bed and turned the light out. I woke at 5.30am and had absolutely no voice! I was meant to be on at 11am, live on Radio 3. I sent all the smoke signals; my agent let Tom Dunford know, and Tom – who is a lovely guy, but likes to sleep in – probably didn't wake up until about five minutes before the rehearsal. Edinburgh Festival didn't know what to do; then Tom messaged to say, 'Why don't we go to rehearsal and see how it sounds?' I sang through an aria and could wheeze out a noise. It was an hour and a half until the concert, it was going to be on the radio and there was a contract, so it had to be done.

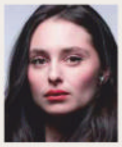
The audience was informed that I'd woken up with no voice (and there was a big sigh of regret) but that I'd got out of bed and I'd be there, and there was a big cheer. That helped a bit, but I don't know how I got through it. It was like waking up in a dream, completely naked on stage. You're wondering if you're damaging your voice, if people who don't know the circumstances are judging you and are listening on the radio. Sometimes, your worst concerts are the ones people most enjoy. I had a friend listen on the radio, and she'd been to the York concert; she messaged saying, 'Listened to you on Radio 3 and it was even better than York!' I was like wtf?!

Iestyn Davies appears on 'My Days', out 23 May on Signum Classics

PABLO STRONG, GETTY

Sweet success: Rachel Portman composed the score for *Chocolat*

My Hero



Violinist ***Esther Abrami*** shares why Oscar-winning screen composer ***Rachel Portman*** has meant so much to her

When I recorded my first album a few years ago, I thought it would be so wonderful to do a piece by Rachel Portman. I'd had no previous contact with her but thought I would try to slide into her DM's on Instagram! I sent her a message saying I was a huge fan of her music, that I was recording an album and would love to do a new arrangement from her soundtrack to *Chocolat*. She replied and said she'd be delighted to do it. I was really honoured, and it's a piece I love playing at every concert now. We then collaborated on my second album and now on my third.

Rachel was one of the first guests on my podcast, *Women in Classical*. She has obviously got an incredible story and has been paving the way for other women composers. You wouldn't think she had won an Oscar (for *Emma*); she was the first woman to win the award (for music) and she's so modest about it.

It's very inspiring to have a meaningful conversation with somebody that talented and to feel like she's talking to you on the same level. I've started composing as well and whenever I've written to Rachel for advice, or an opinion on something in my work, she always replies and is so very supportive.

I talk about her in every concert I do; I play *Chocolat* and tell the audience about her. She's a very important figure for me and is someone who pushed me to take my composing into the world and to include my first composition on my new album.

Esther Abrami's album 'Women' is out on 25 April on Sony Classical

THE LISTENING SERVICE

Play it with a smile

Charlie Chaplin was the most significant cinematic composer of the 20th century, says **Tom Service**, and his music is now more relevant than ever before

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

The most important film composer of the 20th century and beyond? Williams? Guðnadóttir? Steiner? I have another candidate: Charles Spencer Chaplin. Chaplin wrote, directed and starred in his films, from *The Kid* to *The Great Dictator*, and changed the iconography of the 20th century forever. But he was also a composer who wrote and controlled a great deal of the music for his movies, in and out of the silent era.

Yet for many, Chaplin's work as a composer still requires a caveat: he didn't actually 'write' the scores because he wasn't trained to read music; and he needed a team of arrangers to realise his musical dreams. It's an argument filled with hypocrisy: no one says to Paul McCartney that he's 'not a composer' because he can't read music; Hans Zimmer employs more than 200 people who are involved in producing his scores. Chaplin's collaborative model of composition is simply what happens in Hollywood's studios, then and now.

But Chaplin was in charge, creatively and compositionally, of everything in his scores: he knew music's power to transform a scene and to amplify the emotional immediacy of The Tramp's adventures. Take *Modern Times*, his 1936 movie that's prophetic not only of the machine age but of our current debates about human agency in the face of artificial intelligence. For the conductor Ben Palmer – one of the few musicians sanctioned by the Chaplin estate to lead live orchestral performances of his scores – *Modern Times* is Chaplin's finest soundtrack, because of how the music satirises and comments on the action, and how it holds up a mirror to the dehumanisation of the factories and machines of modernity, but does it all with a smile on its face.

> Chaplin distils his musical influences into melodies once heard, never forgotten

And talking of 'Smile', that tune from *Modern Times* became Chaplin's most famous song. It reveals how artfully Chaplin remakes his influences – from Puccini, from Tchaikovsky – and distils them into a melody that's once heard, never forgotten. Chaplin's range of musical reference was vast: at home in Switzerland in later life, he composed scores for his silent films, working by improvising and recording at his piano. Among his friends were Rudolf Serkin, Arthur Rubinstein and Clara Haskil. Chaplin was a musician's musician.

He once pitched a movie for him and Igor Stravinsky to make, a satire on the modern world's attitude to Christianity, with Christ crucified at a nightclub, while businessmen cook up the art of a big deal at the tables below, and the only person who notices what's really going on is a drunk who no one listens to. 'Sacrilegious,' said Igor – alas. What a collaboration that would have been!

The 20th century belongs to Chapin, on screen and in sound: and when you see the film with Chaplin's score in full orchestral spelndour, you realise that his *Modern Times* are our times, too.

BBC RADIO 3 **Tom Service plays the best music to start your weekend in *Saturday Morning* at 9am**

FAREWELL TO...

Single-minded: Sofia Gubaidulina defiantly trod her own musical path

GETTY

Sofia Gubaidulina Born 1931 *Composer*

Born into an atheist family that believed firmly in Soviet values, Sofia Gubaidulina would go on to compose music that expressed her strong Christian faith and thumbed its nose at the Soviet authorities. Adventurous both in technique and in instrumentation – the Russian *bayan*, the Japanese *koto* and various types of percussion were all parts of her armoury – Gubaidulina was also prolific and wide-ranging as a composer, her output including many acclaimed film scores and music for children's cartoons. Her many champions, meanwhile, included Shostakovich, who encouraged her to ignore criticism and continue on the path she was treading as a young composer, and the violinist Gidon Kremer, whose worldwide performances of her *Offertorium* for violin and orchestra in the early 1980s helped to spread her name well beyond her home country.

Gubaidulina's life was an eventful one. After extensive studies in her native Kazan and then at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, she soon found her music receiving enthusiasm from her peers and disapproval from Soviet officials in equal measure. A failed attempt to strangle her in an elevator is believed to have been the work of the KGB, and in 1979 she was one of seven composers formally denounced by Tikhon Khrennikov, leader of the Union of Soviet Composers. After the collapse of the USSR, in 1992 Gubaidulina moved to Germany, where she continued to add to a portfolio that would go on to include works such as a Viola Concerto written for Yuri Bashmet (1996), *In Tempus Praesens*, a violin concerto for Anne-Sophie Mutter, and choral works including 2000's *Johannes-Passion*, written to celebrate the 250th anniversary of JS Bach's death.

Also remembered...

Nicolas Kynaston (born 1941) was a former organist of Westminster Cathedral who went on to enjoy a career as an international touring performer, making recordings that ranged from JS Bach to Liszt.

The American mezzo **Elizabeth Russo** (born 1960) enjoyed an opera career, especially in Wagner, in London before returning to the US where she served as cantor and soloist at Saint Paul Roman Catholic Church in Greenwich, Connecticut, for 25 years.

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Pick a theme... and name your seven favourite examples

Pianist Yevgeny Sudbin chooses the most gleefully ghoulish pieces inspired by death and mysticism

Brought up in Russia, pianist Yevgeny Sudbin moved to Berlin aged 10, and then to London at 17, graduating from the Royal Academy of Music. He made his BBC Proms debut in July 2008 and has since performed with orchestras all over the world. Widely considered to be an example of the Russian pianistic tradition – thanks to his vivid musical imagination and virtuosity – he is a champion of Scriabin and Medtner. His new recording of Scriabin's piano works is released on BIS this month.

Scriabin *Vers la Flamme*

The pianist Vladimir Horowitz, who met Scriabin when he was ten years old, said that Scriabin had this fantasy of engulfing the whole world in fire – of destroying it and creating something better out of it. *Vers la Flamme*, meaning 'Towards the Flame', embodies this concept, conjuring the image of a fire that gets bigger and bigger until it engulfs the whole piano. I love the way that Scriabin generates such complexity from simple beginnings; for me, this symbolises the idea of the universe. What emerges is something bigger than the sum of its parts.

Medtner *Stimmungsbilder*, Op. 1, 'The Angel'

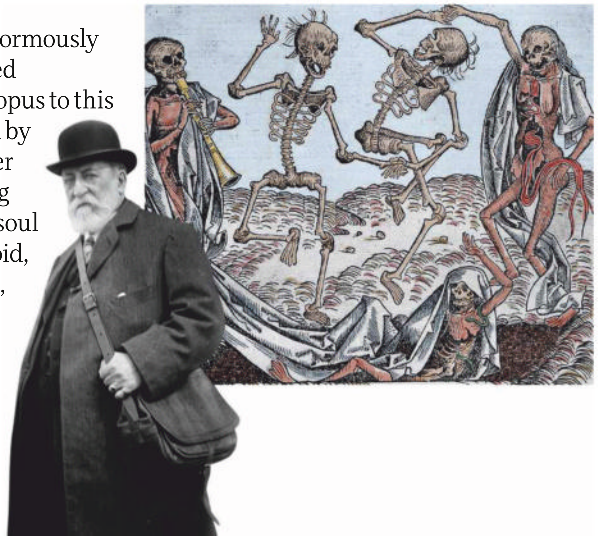
Unlike Scriabin, who evolved enormously as a composer, Medtner remained consistent in style from his first opus to this last. This piece, based on a poem by Lermontov, is the first one he ever wrote. It speaks of an angel flying across the sky, carrying a young soul in its arms. That may seem morbid, but the piece is incredibly serene, without a hint of sorrow. It's like Mozart's music, where you feel you can't change a single note: a sublime take on a subject that others might see as painful and negative.

Scriabin *Prometheus, Poem of Fire*

This work, which depicts fire as a symbol of the development of human consciousness, is full of mysticism. It's the first piece, I think, ever to combine light with music, thanks to the inclusion of the colour organ: a new instrument that Scriabin invented for this piece, which emits coloured light instead of music. But what I find incredible are the harmonies – at once out of the ordinary and primordial, as though they have always been there, like the fabric of the universe. And the way that the choir blends harmonically when it comes in towards the end gives me goose bumps.

Medtner *Fairy Tale*, Op. 51 No 3

Medtner wrote a lot of musical fairy tales and, being part-German, he took inspiration from German folklore. I was sitting at Euston Square station, surrounded by people in suits on their way to work, when I heard this music. It immediately gripped me – there was something about the way Medtner used harmonies, rhythms and textures that was so imaginative but also so pianistic. I just had to sit down to listen to it properly and then listen to it many more times. It felt like being hit by magic.



PETER RIGAUD, GETTY

Debussy *L'Isle Joyeuse*

This piece, based on Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting *The Embarkation for Cythera*, symbolises the quest to achieve eternal bliss: it is full of beautiful, watery textures in the piano and constant shifts in key, with an orgiastic climax towards the end, leaving you with the feeling that, after this experience, the whole island drowns and everybody on it either dies or transforms. There is the idea that you can die of ecstasy – Scriabin was obsessed with it, and I feel that Debussy was also tapping into it. This is probably his most exuberant and extravagant musical work.

Saint-Saëns *Danse macabre*

This piece, in which the dead are summoned up from their graves, is the most literal depiction of death on my list. But what is striking is its whimsical, humorous quality. This idea that death comes to you, takes you by the hand and starts trying to get you to dance: it's kind of ridiculous, almost making fun of death. Then everybody dances through the night, and the whole thing becomes crazy and convoluted, until the morning hours when the cockerel crows its famous tune. Although we often hear this piece in its orchestral version, it works brilliantly on the piano: you can hear the bones rattling.

Scriabin Piano Sonata No. 9, 'Black Mass'

This piece is also about summoning demons back to life. But whereas *Danse macabre* is ridiculous and humorous, this is very dark. Interestingly, around the time that the piece was written, devil worship, sadism, necrophilia, cannibalism and other strange ceremonies were thriving throughout Russia. For instance, the painter Nikolai Sperling, Scriabin's favourite artist, drank human blood and ate human flesh to achieve mystical experiences. So, there was something in the air at the time and maybe some of it worked its way into this music – it is terrifying.

Interview by Hannah Nepilova

Master of darkness:
Yevgeny Sudbin chooses works about death and the afterlife; (opposite) *The Dance of Death* (1493) by Michael Wolgemut; composer Camille Saint-Saëns

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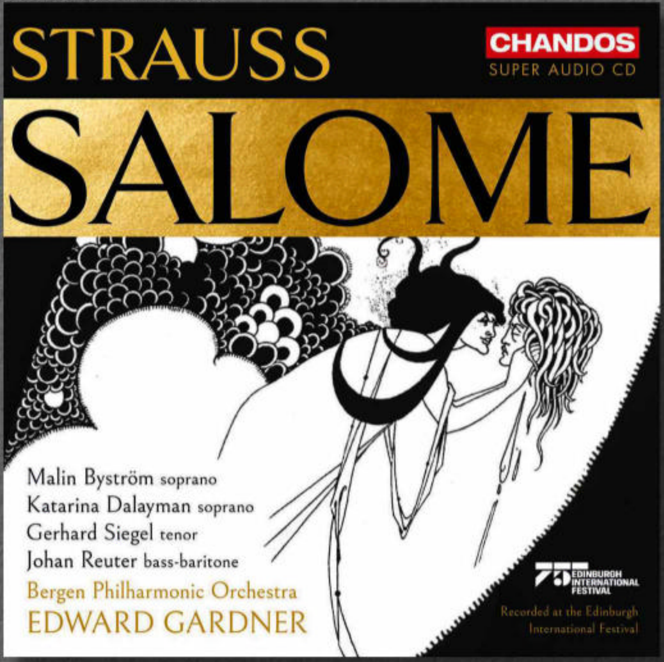
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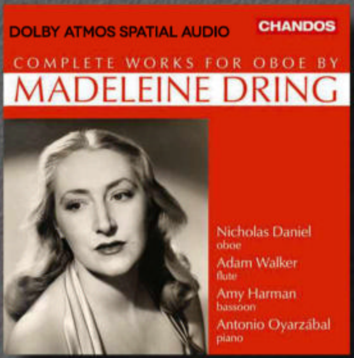
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Adam Walker flute
Amy Harman bassoon
Antonio Oyarzábal piano

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MADELINE DRING

COMPLETE WORKS FOR OBOE

Nicholas Daniel | Adam Walker | Amy Harman | Antonio Oyarzábal

Madeleine Dring studied with Herbert Howells, Gordon Jacob, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and composed mostly for the theatre. Dring was married to Roger Lord, a long-time principal oboe of the LSO, for whom she wrote a number of works and who prepared several arrangements, all collected here.

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Richard Morrison

From frontline action to opera: my father's musical memories of WWII

I cannot think about the 80th anniversary of VE Day without remembering my late mother and father. On 8 May 1945 they were 19 and 21 years old. My mother was training to be a teacher. My father was in a tank, part of the British Army's 11th Armoured Division that had grimly fought its way across Belgium and Germany.

By May 1945 each had lost a brother in the war. Other brothers were still involved in the conflict in the Far East, where the war continued until August. One, captured by the Japanese, never returned. The joy on the streets of British cities on VE Day, chronicled in so many newsreels and photographs, was not fake – but it masked a terrible sadness.

Despite the war, music-making had continued. When my father was conscripted, at 18, he had to defer his place at music college (little did he realise he would be in his mid-20s before he could take it up). However, he was a bit of a teenage prodigy on any number of brass instruments (he came from a Salvation Army brass band family) and, more usefully in wartime, the piano accordion – an instrument that could be hiked around army canteens and camps. He also had the ability to play any popular tune by ear, fully harmonised, after one or two hearings. Consequently, he was much in demand for singsongs, dances and other improvised entertainments.

His finest hour, however, came on the eve of what everyone knew would be a brutal battle against an entrenched SS Panzer Division somewhere in Belgium. He was suddenly summoned by his commanding officer, a fierce Scotsman. 'Sadly, Morrison, you don't play the bagpipes,' the officer barked. 'So, you will take your accordion into your tank, we will all switch our radios to your frequency, and you will play as we advance.' And that's how the British Army rolled into battle the next day – to the stirring refrain of the 'Chattanooga Choo-Choo' played on an old squeeze-box.

My father used to recount that tale with a wry smile. The experience he almost never talked about happened a few months later, on 16 April 1945. As the 11th Armoured Division advanced into Germany, they came across a horrific place. It was Bergen-Belsen, the concentration camp between Hamburg and Hanover. By chance, my father was among the first group of soldiers to enter. The memory of what he encountered there – the dead bodies and the barely living – stayed with him for the rest of his life, undoubtedly affecting him as a human being and, I believe, as a musician too.

The British army tanks rolled into battle to the stirring sounds of my father's old squeeze-box

I think it made him determined to use his one big talent – musical ability – to enrich the lives of those around him. He became a wonderful music teacher, working in very challenging schools with few resources yet putting on concerts and shows that kids remembered for decades afterwards.

Soon after VE Day he came back to London for a few days' leave. He had promised to take my mother, his future wife, out to a West End show – not least to celebrate them both surviving the war. But popular hits such as Ivor Novello's *Perchance to Dream* and Noel Gay's *Me and My Girl* were totally sold out, and my father didn't have the money to buy from the touts. The only thing he could get his hands on was a pair of tickets for an unknown new opera being done at Sadler's Wells Theatre – which wasn't even in the West End.

My mother, expecting to be entertained by a nice light comedy, hated every minute of it. A headstrong Yorkshire lass who didn't suffer fools (or soft southerners) gladly, she almost dumped my father on the spot for making her sit through what she would always subsequently refer to as 'that incomprehensible racket'.

My father appreciated the music more, though his abiding memory (an accurate one, it seems from other reports) was that 'it could have fallen apart at any minute – nobody seemed too sure of what they were doing'. The new opera, of course, was *Peter Grimes* by the rising young English composer Benjamin Britten.

Today we tend to think that its premiere was a seismic moment, ushering in the post-war renaissance of British music. Perhaps it was. But it's sobering to recall that, for people in the audience such as my mother and father, it was actually one of the least startling or life-changing experiences they went through in 1945. Context is everything.

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times

KEEP CALM AND COMPOSE

British composers played a vital role in lifting spirits in World War II, sometimes in unlikely ways. Rob Ainsley tells how they played their part with symphonies, film scores… and jam

Audiences at the 1943 Proms season experienced performances of two great, very different, war symphonies. On Thursday 24 June, the world premiere of Vaughan Williams's Fifth; then on Monday 19 July, Shostakovich's Seventh, first heard in Britain at the previous year's Proms.

Shostakovich was in a besieged Leningrad, frozen and starving. Dark and epic, the Seventh's narrative martial solemnity set the pattern for 'war music'. VW, however, wrote his in the comparative warmth and comfort of Dorking. His magic Fifth floats serenely, like morning haze over the Cotswolds. Any struggle – in its *Romanza*, inspired by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* – is personal, internal.

Bombs were, nevertheless, pounding Britain. The 1940 Proms had been cut short by the Luftwaffe's destruction of its base, the Queen's Hall – the only available London venue for the 1941 season was the Royal Albert Hall, its home ever since. A symphony can't grow potatoes or rebuild houses. But music can charge a national spirit, lift morale and perhaps help spades dig for victory or trowels spread cement a bit more resolutely. So what did Britain's composers do to help the war effort? It's a tale of film scores, jail terms, jam-making and bad driving.

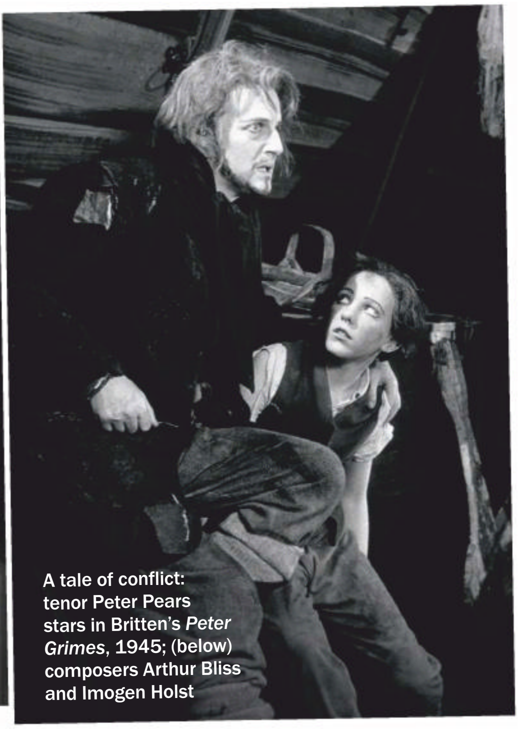
Vaughan Williams himself was a veteran of World War I. In 1914-18, he'd put music on pause to enlist as a private in the Medical Corps – harrowing work down in the field, even though at 42 he could have been excused. Also serving were Arthur Bliss (with ➤

Blitz and pieces: an Entertainments National Service Association performance raises morale for people taking shelter in the London Underground, 1940; (below) Vaughan Williams went well beyond the call of duty; (bottom) conductors Henry Wood and Adrian Boult at The Proms, 1942

GETTY

TEMPLE STA
DISTRICT

Uniform appeal: theatre organist Sandy MacPherson is joined by Canadian soldiers for 'Sandy's Half Hour' on BBC Radio, 1940



A tale of conflict: tenor Peter Pears stars in Britten's *Peter Grimes*, 1945; (below) composers Arthur Bliss and Imogen Holst

> Home-grown works were promoted, but Britain had no rigid diktats or propaganda

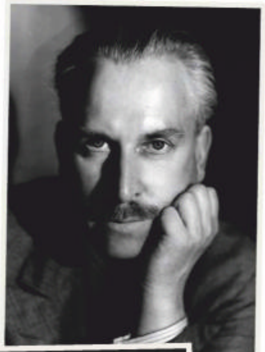
distinction), Gordon Jacob, EJ Moeran and George Dyson. They survived; many young composers didn't, the most lamented being George Butterworth.

By the time World War II, the sequel, reached Britain on 3 September 1939, life had changed. The nature of warfare had changed too. Composers weren't expected to be wielding guns or joysticks. Pencils and batons, more like, composing and conducting music for radio, film soundtracks or morale-boosting concerts.

Conscripts and volunteers had their musical duties looked on favourably. Alan Rawsthorne got leave to conduct his Piano Concerto at the 1942 Proms – for which Alan Bush was similarly let off to direct his First. Edmund Rubbra was asked by the War Office to form a trio for forces concerts. Eric Fenby served in the Education Corps. Gerald Finzi worked at the Ministry of War Transport and took in refugees. Ronald Binge, later to write the 'Shipping Forecast music' *Sailing By*, was in the RAF… organising events. And Victor Hely-Hutchinson, a composer who became chiefly known as a music administrator, was an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden.

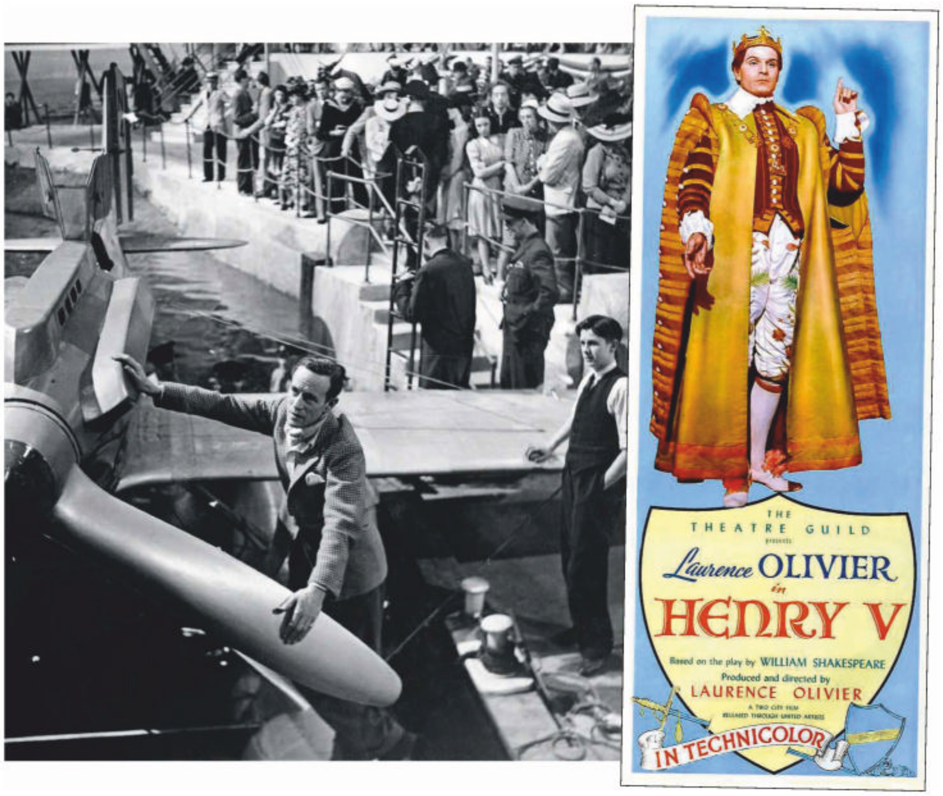
The radio was a vital way of keeping the national chin up, and British light music's jaunty, hummable orchestral tunes flourished. Gordon Jacob wrote humorous arrangements of popular melodies for the comedy favourite *ITMA*. Eric Coates's *Calling All Workers* of 1940 – inspired by his wife wanting something sprightly to cheer up her fellow volunteers – became the theme to the BBC's productivity-boosting *Music While You Work*.

Live music was also important. ENSA, the Entertainments National Service Association for British armed forces, organised concerts for the troops by the leading popular performers of the day: Vera Lynn, Gracie Fields, George Formby. Jokes were one thing never rationed in wartime Britain: wags referred to it as 'Every Night Something Awful'. ENSA's loftier counterpart was CEMA, the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts – highbrow maybe, but its passionate members believed in bringing serious music to everyone. They funded 'music travellers', principally women, to travel the country to involve amateurs in music-making and listening. A notable 'traveller' was composer Imogen Holst, who went on to help establish Dartington as a music education hub, and modestly assisted Benjamin Britten after the war.



Vaughan Williams, pushing 70 when the war started, served on CEMA – desk work and admin was one way composers could put their musical mojo to national use. Similarly, Lennox Berkeley worked at the BBC, where Arthur Bliss was the director of music and also served on the British Council's Music Committee with VW and Walton.

ENSA, CEMA, the BBC, the British Council, the Crown Film Unit… various bodies were using music to raise morale. Home-grown works were promoted, but unlike Germany (see p30), Britain had no rigid diktats on propaganda. Nothing was compulsory, nor were 'enemy' composers banned. Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, even Hitler's ideological poster-boy Wagner, filled the airwaves and concert halls. German music was presented as noble, high-ideals, globally owned art, the product of a civilisation



Propelled to greatness: (above) actor Leslie Howard on the set of *The First of the Few*, 1942, and a poster for Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V*, both boasting filmscores composed by William Walton

corrupted but which could re-emerge – an approach defended by VW in a BBC radio talk, despite some jingoistic opposition.

In fact, Vaughan Williams was one of four major composers whose contrasting wartime stories neatly show how Britain's peace-loving creatives coped with the challenges of national duty. He was the established veteran, the other three were emerging: jazz-age one-off William Walton; boy-wonder Benjamin Britten; and idealist-dreamer Michael Tippett.

Pieces and pacifism

Walton was not cut out for active service. His efforts at ambulance driving ended up in ditches, thanks to his inability to double-declutch. But like others (such as William Alwyn) he excelled in that burgeoning new genre: film scores. After success in 1935 with *Escape Me Never* – which helped pay for his Belgravia house – he contributed landmark soundtracks to several wartime propaganda features including *Went the Day Well?*, *Henry V* and *The First of the Few*. But the syncopated energy of his previous works was giving way to solemn Coronation-style marches: Walton had unintentionally inherited Elgar's mantle as the supplier of processional music to the nation.

He had a wary rivalry with Britten, the young genius of new British music. A few months before war broke out, Britten had gone to the US with his friend (and soon, life-partner) Peter Pears. The idea of escaping political tension was a factor, though not the only one – Britten was mainly doing what lots of late-twentysomethings do: leaving emotional baggage at home to seek new professional opportunities abroad.

Their intended three-week US jaunt ended up being three years, as authorities advised them it was too dangerous to return home. But they were homesick, unhappy in America's hustle, and Britten's musical earnings were so unreliable that at one point he seriously contemplated working in a hardware store.

So return they did, in 1942, on a perilous month-long boat journey back to a much-bombed Blighty. (Comically, US customs confiscated the score of his *Hymn to St Cecilia*, thinking it was coded enemy messages.) Their absence hadn't gone unnoticed by snarky letters-to-the-editor, often of a homophobic nature – nobody sniped at Bliss's similar US absence and return. In amongst performing at home and abroad, Britten and Pears settled in East Anglia, whose austere landscapes and looming skies – plus the poetry of George Crabbe – inspired Britten to write his own 'war masterpiece', *Peter Grimes*. The opera's gritty drama and powerful

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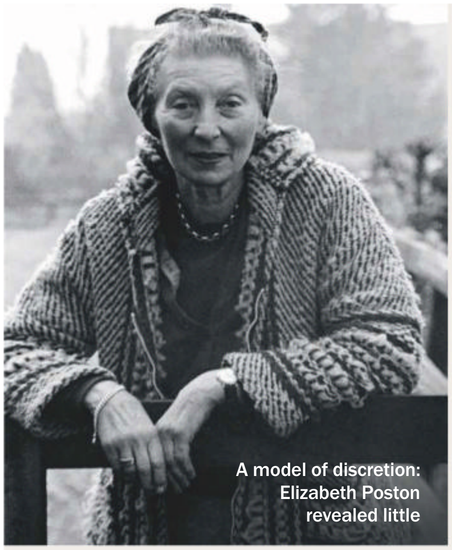


A model of discretion: Elizabeth Poston revealed little

Carols and secret codes

Composer Elizabeth Poston

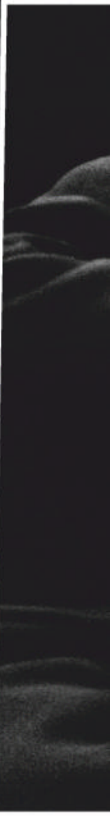
Today, she is best known for her popular carol 'Jesus Christ the Apple Tree' plus various other choral, vocal and chamber works, and as the former editor of the *Penguin Book of Carols*. During the Second World War, however, composer Elizabeth Poston appears to have led a double life… as a British secret agent.

Poston conducted her clandestine operations from within the depths of the BBC, which she joined in 1940, eventually reaching the role of European Music Supervisor three years later. Working alone in Bush House in London (pictured above), she is believed to have been responsible for picking out precise pieces of music which, when broadcast across Europe, contained hidden messages that could be only deciphered by those in possession of a code.

Famously discreet, even after the conflict had long since ended, Poston gave very little away about her wartime activities beyond the odd hint here and there and once explaining to a friend how the system required the needle to be placed at an exact point of a gramophone record for the code to work – any lack of precision could have disastrous consequences. As to what those codes were or how they were interpreted, however, she remained entirely tight-lipped, right up until her death in 1987. We are still none the wiser today.

Victory salute: Winston Churchill adopts the popular 'V' sign; (below) a wartime propaganda poster

Taking a stand: (right) as a conscientious objector, Michael Tippett served time in prison; (middle) Paul Beard, leader of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, at a rehearsal of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, 1945



music, as stark and sidelit as a 1940s *noir*, heralded a new age of British music at its 1945 premiere.

Britten and Tippett, meanwhile, got on well, though their music is as different as their personalities. Britten: powerful shades of grey, impeccably controlled. Tippett: exuberant, flowing, colourful. Following study of Jungian psychology in 1939, Tippett decided that – as a gay outsider – his life should be dedicated to composing. For a man of intense artistic ideals, this meant total pacifism, and he registered as a conscientious objector. His 1942 tribunal gave him non-violent options to contribute to the war effort – air raid work, fire duties, farming – but he refused them all, spending two months in Wormwood Scrubs prison as a result.

> The violent horrors of the Nazis' rise were very much on Tippett's mind

Film scores weren't Tippett's thing, but his wartime masterpiece is powerfully cinematic. He had always actively supported the working class and downtrodden, especially in the north of England; he also helped Morley College in London establish itself as a creative wartime music centre with amateurs and professionals working together. The day war broke out, he started *A Child of Our Time*: a set of laments – to his own libretto – on the injustices of the world. The violent horrors of the Nazis' rise and their persecution of the Jews were very much on his mind, and his oratorio addresses all oppression and genocide: its sections are linked by African-American spirituals, which he saw as a universal cry of suffering and defiance.

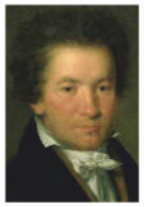
A major supporter of Tippett during his tribunal tussles was that pragmatic socialist Vaughan Williams. He testified in Tippett's favour, saying he disagreed with his views but defended his right to have them. Privately, though, he challenged him. Dedicating yourself to pure art is all very well, VW wrote to him, but if your house is on fire you don't write music about it, you help put the damn thing out – or else you won't have anywhere to write music in future.

Well-to-do and way past retirement age, VW didn't need to work during the war. But he did. And it wasn't just committee duties, or writing letters of support to, and about, composers. He also enthusiastically dived into the unfamiliar discipline of film scores, most notably for Powell and Pressburger's propaganda heavy-goods-vehicle *49th Parallel*, whose opening – snowy Canadian mountains accompanied by rural-olde-Englande melodies – may look incongruous now. Nevertheless, the industrious VW produced more fine film music, his Oboe Concerto and spirit-lifting works playable by ad-hoc amateur ensembles in dusty village halls. And, of course, he completed that radiant Fifth Symphony, started in 1938 but moulded during the darkest days of war. His furious pre-war Fourth and stormy post-war Sixth often burn with rage, but the Fifth's transcendent visions of peace and harmony caught a national mood.

VW came through the war well. (It also brought him his much younger second wife, Ursula). Richard Addinsell did OK too, though by accident. For the 1941 film

Putting the 'V' in Beethoven

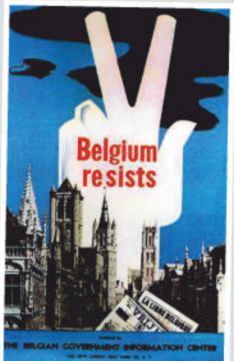
How his Fifth rattled the Germans

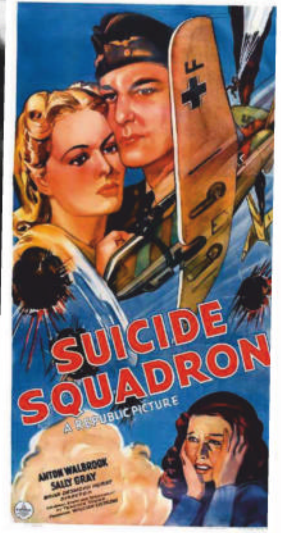


It was Victor de Laveleye, an exiled politician from Nazi-occupied Belgium, who in 1941 thought of using the letter 'V' as a rallying symbol for his country – an idea he was able to promote as an announcer for the BBC's Radio Belgique service. It quickly took off, not just in Belgium but across the rest of occupied Europe; plus Britain, too, where the BBC launched a 'V for Victory' campaign.

Rather fortuitously, the letter 'V' in Morse Code – dot-dot-dot-dash – had the same rhythm as the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony which, as the BBC continued to bombard the European airwaves, rapidly became adopted as the symbol's aural equivalent. As well as appearing on the radio with increased regularity, Beethoven's familiar 'Da da da Dum' also became the default rhythm for, say, knocking on doors and summoning waiters, and was even heard from church bell towers.

All of which hit the German occupiers where it hurt. Ideally, they would have stamped it out, but banning the music of their treasured Beethoven (above) was just unthinkable. That said, as the grandson of a Belgian singer – as revealed by the 'van' in his name – might the composer himself have approved?


Belgium resists
THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CENTER



Flying high: the *Warsaw Concerto*, derived from Addinsell's music for *Dangerous Moonlight* (*Suicide Squadron* in the US; left), was a *Desert Island Discs* choice of the Dambusters' Guy Gibson (above); (below) Elisabeth Lutyens

Dangerous Moonlight (US title: *Suicide Squadron*), the 37-year-old composer wrote Rachmaninov-style piano concerto snippets, commissioned because using real Rach was unaffordable. Cobbled together as the *Warsaw Concerto*, the music became a huge hit, and Dambusters commander Guy Gibson later chose it as one of his Desert Island Discs on the radio.

But not everyone had a 'good war'. The brilliant all-rounder Constant Lambert was spreading himself too thin, and the booze too liberally. Arnold Bax disappeared in well-lubricated retirement. Gerald Finzi had potentially breakthrough premieres (*Dies Natalis*) scuppered by the hostilities, and John Ireland's star faded. As did Walton's somewhat, despite those film successes.

Women composers were active too, though were faced with other challenges. Elisabeth Lutyens and Elizabeth Maconchy were among the new female arrivals enjoying Proms premieres and commissions but, whether during war or not, women expected – and were expected – to be at home with the family. The time pressures of baking and child-rearing while grappling with that development section of the fast movement often told.

Lutyens, a pioneer of 12-tone music, wrote some nevertheless whistleable works for the war effort when she and her three-child family decamped to Newcastle. But the disruption to her work, the air raids and the gas masks got her down, and she had a breakdown before rescuing her career back down in London. Meanwhile, Maconchy – in the middle of her superb series of string quartets – had her music career essentially on hold while evacuated to Ludlow. Friends marvelled at her ability to make jam, bottle fruit and snatch composition time between feeding her children. Grace Williams, one of Wales's most notable composing names, was also struggling: exhausted from teaching work and the strife of conflict, she gave up composing in 1944 – fortunately, only temporarily.

In his 2020 book *Culture and Propaganda in World War II*, John Morris writes: 'The most striking thing about wartime composers is the quality of the film music that was produced. Not surprising from Walton, maybe – his music for *Henry V* was quite groundbreaking. And VW's score for *49th Parallel* also remains outstanding. This was the one and only Ministry of Information-sponsored feature film, and as ever VW jumped right into the project with his usual dedication, but admitting he couldn't "Mickey Mouse" in the way that standard Hollywod composers worked. The result, however, was a certain kind of quality that hadn't existed in film music before.'

Maybe it was the trope of muddling through, but Britain's arm's-length policy on music in wartime evidently worked. Propaganda was cleverly done, and well-measured; microphone not megaphone. Creative artists were prodded rather than bullied into contributing to the war effort. And composers, by and large, were allowed to do what they did best: creating music. Music that wasn't bombastic or martial – no 'British "Leningrad" Symphony' – but which evoked the values that were being defended.

Vaughan Williams, Britten, Walton, Tippett and the rest wrote diverse masterpieces that reassured and inspired a nation to win through and reboot Britain post-1945. VW's Fifth, in particular, offered emotional refuge to people in an unstable, dangerous, frightening world. Unfortunately, it still does.

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The sound of oppression

In wartime Germany and its occupied countries, music was a carefully controlled part of the Nazi propaganda machine, as Erik Levi explains

It's astonishing: only six days after the D-Day landings, the Berlin Philharmonic was in Paris entertaining an enraptured audience with Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner. According to eye-witness accounts, the French greeted the orchestra with such frenzied enthusiasm that it had to play several encores before being allowed to leave the stage.

Such unrestrained French enthusiasm for German artists seems unfathomable, given that the German army had occupied Paris for nearly four years. Yet what this neatly illustrates is the premium the Nazis placed upon stellar performances of the core German repertoire for promoting their notions of cultural supremacy. This tactic of weaponising classical music to soften up the populations in the occupied territories proved to be remarkably successful – it enabled the occupiers to secure complete acknowledgement from the occupied of German artistic hegemony while creating the myth that the two parties shared similar cultural values.

The Berlin Philharmonic was undoubtedly one of the country's most potent assets in this process – from 1940-42, the orchestra gave well over 200 concerts outside Germany, of which the majority took place in occupied territories, though there were also tours to countries that were politically aligned to Nazi Germany. And the purpose of these concerts differed according to where they were performing.

Two weeks after the fall of France in 1940, the three concerts given by the Berlin Philharmonic in Paris and Versailles had three objectives: providing moral support for the German soldiers; securing strong approval at home for the orchestra's war efforts; and, perhaps most importantly, stimulating potential future collaboration from French civilians. In stark contrast, when it performed in occupied Eastern Europe, locals were forbidden to attend – these concerts were exclusively given in front of a German-speaking public. Here, the intention was far removed from securing any peaceful

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Cultural envoys: Karl Böhm conducts the Berlin Philharmonic at the Liceu in Barcelona, 1941; (below) conductor Eugen Jochum arrives in Paris for another Berlin Philharmonic engagement; (above right) a wreath laid by Hitler in Vienna on the 150th anniversary of Mozart's death; (top right) Orff's *Carmina Burana* is performed in Essen

promotion of classical music, but rather a brutal demonstration of German cultural policy which, in the case of occupied Poland, sought to destroy all local institutions and traditions.

The Berlin Philharmonic was by no means the only cultural ambassador to be wheeled out of Germany on a fairly regular basis, as The Propaganda Ministry engaged a stream of star instrumentalists, singers and conductors to tour various parts of Europe in support of the war effort. Among the most grandiose projects were visits from leading German opera companies. In 1941, for example, the Mannheim National Theatre appeared at the Opéra Garnier in Paris in Wagner's *Die Walküre,* their presence in the French capital then immeasurably enhanced a few days later when the same forces performed the work in the French language.

> Mozart's Requiem was performed with a new text that removed all Hebrew words

Other ventures were even more ambitious. In 1941, the Frankfurt Opera presented a month-long season at Barcelona's Teatro Liceu, staging Wagner's *Ring* cycle and works by Mozart and Richard Strauss. The entire company of singers and an orchestra of over 100 players decamped to the city, plus 30 crates of scenery and equipment that had to be transported in extremely difficult conditions over the Pyrenees. It must have cost a great deal of money, but the Nazis provided the funds in the knowledge that some of the most influential people in Spain would be attending. Their presence reinforced the cultural and political legitimacy of the Nazi regime, and could help to secure a more proactive Spanish involvement in the war.

On the home front, the outbreak of war necessitated a more ruthlessly xenophobic policy than had been the case in the years before. One month after the invasion of Poland, the Reichsmusikkammer issued a blanket ban on performing works by composers from enemy countries. But the law was sufficiently flexible to allow for some notable exceptions – for example, Bizet's *Carmen* was deemed far too popular to be removed from German opera houses. Likewise, the music of Chopin continued to be played in Germany, whereas Poles living under Nazi occupation were forbidden to perform it for fear of stirring up local nationalist feelings.

In 1940, the Propaganda Ministry unveiled a new organisation known as the Reich Office for Musical Arrangement. Part of its brief was to recast the texts of popular musical stage works that for various reasons were deemed ideologically inappropriate in the context of war. A programme was also unveiled to aryanise the texts of Handel oratorios that were based on episodes from the Old Testament. Fanatical anti-Semitism afflicted the performance and reception of other hallowed masterpieces – Mozart's Requiem was performed and recorded in Berlin in 1941 with a new text that removed all Hebrew words, and there was even an attempt to reconfigure Schumann's song-cycle *Dichterliebe* with lyrics that replaced the poems by Heine, though it is unclear whether any performances of this new 'arrangement' ever took place.

In the foreword to his notorious *Lexicon of Jews in Music* of 1941, Nazi musicologist Herbert Gerigk proudly claimed the Jewish influence on German music had been eradicated. Soon after, however, he had to eat his words after discovering to his horror that several wartime recordings of the Beethoven and Brahms violin concertos featuring German soloists retained the cadenzas by Joachim and Kreisler, both Jews.

Although works by Jewish and modernist composers had not featured in Germany

The show must go on: (right) Richard Strauss and soprano Viorica Ursuleac at the premiere of *Capriccio* amid the blackout in Munich, 1942; (below) the opera received the support of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels

for several years, political expediency with countries that were wartime allies ensured modest representation of Italian, Hungarian and Spanish music in concerts from 1939-45. Russian music also found unexpected, albeit temporary, favour from 1939-41 as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. But for the most part, the Nazis relied heavily on promoting and celebrating great German composers of the past.

Undoubtedly, the most ambitious wartime project in this respect was the Mozart commemoration that took place throughout the German Reich and some of the occupied territories throughout 1941, 150 years after the composer's death. The climax took place in December in Vienna, where all of Mozart's mature operas were staged and delegations from all over Europe were in attendance to hear rabble-rousing speeches from political leaders such as Baldur von Schirach, who claimed that performing Mozart formed a 'vital part of what our soldiers are fighting for in defending our country against the wild assault of the barbarians from the East'.

Inevitably, the war prompted a number of contemporary German composers to churn out patriotic cantatas which used texts glorifying heroic exploits on the battlefield from previous eras, but the regime was far more supportive of contemporary music that deflected attention away from the horrors of conflict. Orff's *Carmina Burana* was one work that fitted this bill, and it enjoyed frequent performances during the war. The Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* described the work in 1940 as 'the kind of disciplined music that is entirely appropriate for our era'. Yet the texts that inspired Orff, drawn from bawdy poems written by Benedictine monks in the medieval era, have nothing whatsoever to do with the imagery of war.

A more extreme example of musical escapism took place on 28 October 1942 at the Munich National Theatre, with the world premiere of Richard Strauss's last opera, *Capriccio*. By all accounts, the opera house was filled to capacity, and the audience gave the work a rapturous reception. Correspondents from all over Germany were sent to Munich to review it, their articles taking up extensive column inches in many newspapers and journals.

That the performance was given under the 'patronage of Reichsminister Dr Goebbels' signified official approval of the work, even if the relationship between composer and politician had become distinctly frosty by this stage. More significantly, Strauss's Mozartian idiom and the opera's scenario, debating the primacy between words and music set in aristocratic 18th-century France, exude a timelessness which are as far removed from the catastrophic external environment of wartime Europe as could be imagined.

This begs the obvious question as to what motivated Goebbels to support such an ideologically opaque work as *Capriccio*. Perhaps the answer lies in the morale-boosting circumstances in which the performance took place. We have to remember that at that time, Munich was under constant bombardment from the Allies, and that the opera, which was performed without a break, could easily have been curtailed by the sounding of a fire alarm. Yet the spirit of determination that motivated the audience to attend the opera, whatever the odds, counted for a great deal, and represented for Goebbels that spirit of self-sacrifice that formed a vital element in bolstering the nation particularly when it was under the cosh.

Several years later, Rudolf Hartmann, who directed the first performance of *Capriccio,* vividly recalled the excitement surrounding this performance: 'Who among the younger generation can really imagine a great city like Munich in total darkness, or theatre goers picking their way through the blacked-out street with the aid of small torches giving off a dim blue light? All this for the experience of the *Capriccio* premiere. They risked being caught in a heavy air raid, yet their yearning to hear Strauss's music, their desire to be part of a festive occasion and to experience a world of beauty beyond the dangers of war led them to overcome all these material problems. Afterwards, it was difficult to relinquish the liberating and uniting atmosphere created by the artistic quality of the new work.'

Subversive scores: composer Francis Poulenc

Otherwise occupied

A tale of French resistance

Berlin Philharmonic concerts in occupied France may have been well attended, but the country's own composers were not all so welcoming to their German visitors. While Darius Milhaud, from a Jewish family, and Germaine Tailleferre escaped to the US, fellow members of 'Les Six' group of composers stuck around and expressed their opposition to the Nazis in various ways.

For Louis Durey, that meant refusing to compose anything at all; ditto Georges Auric, with the exception of his pointed *Quatre chants de la France malheureuse* ('Four songs for a miserable France'). Francis Poulenc did continue to compose, but loaded his music with subversive references. He and Durey were also members of the Resistance organisation the Front National des Musiciens, which aimed to champion French culture and protect Jewish musicians.

Among the composers who went into active service were Olivier Messiaen who, serving as a medical auxiliary, was captured and imprisoned at Stalag VIII-A, where he wrote *Quartet for the End of Time*. Jehan Alain, meanwhile, was killed in action in June 1940 while serving as a dispatch rider in the French Army, his fierce resistance in battle earning him a posthumous Croix de Guerre.

GETTY

LEAPS & BOUNDS
ROBERT SAXTON
String quartets No. 3 & 4
Sonata for Solo violin 'Reflections in Time'
KREUTZER QUARTET
Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin
IN THE MIRROR
MUSIC BY WOMEN COMPOSERS
YOKO MISUMI
HEATHER TUACH
EDWARD COWIE
ROCK MUSIC
Piano Sonatas 1-3
Roderick Chadwick, piano
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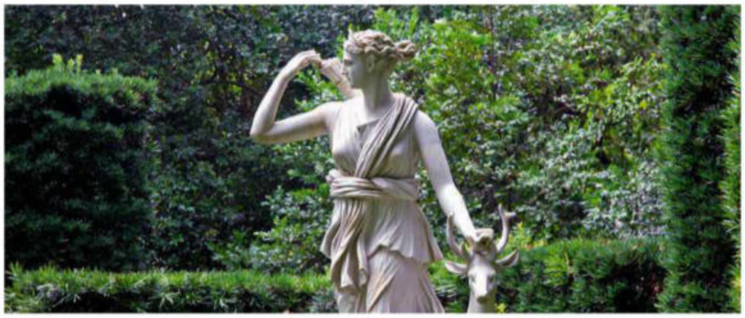

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Left (top): Vienna's extraordinary Grand Opera House State Opera; (bottom) Mozart is celebrated on the Salzburg walking tour. Above: Amsterdam's wonderful Concertgebouw in full flow; (right) a river cruise on the Danube.

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A different picture

There's more to Dame Myra Hess than her morale-boosting National Gallery concerts – not least her formidable piano skills, writes Jessica Duchen

I've wanted to write a biography of the pianist Dame Myra Hess for as long as I can remember. Certainly, since my mother, who was also named Myra, first told me about the National Gallery lunchtime concerts that Hess ran during World War II, bolstering the people's morale while under attack. These ran on weekdays for six-and-a-half years, weaponising the love of music into an act of resistance.

The crowds flocked to Trafalgar Square, with attendances of well over a thousand, come rain, shine or bombs. It proved beyond doubt the deep, human need for great music, even – or especially – at the worst of times. 'IT IS SAID SOMETIMES THAT MUSIC IS A FORM OF ESCAPE,' Hess noted when the series closed in 1946, 'but the experience of these years has made us understand that it is infinitely more IMPORTANT THAN THAT.' The caps are hers.

If Hess had made the equivalent achievement in visual art, theatre or literature, there might have been a library shelf dedicated to her. Instead, the UK publishing industry tends to treat classical music as the kiss of death. There were only two previous books about her, both long out of print. Most articles talk either about her recordings – which she loathed making – or the, ahem, 'iconic' National Gallery concerts. Some assume she cannot have been worth remembering beyond the latter. But those concerts were only possible because Hess was already one of Britain's greatest pianists and a significant international superstar. She had the clout to keep them going against all odds.

Hess was born into a religious Jewish family in south Hampstead in 1890, the youngest of four siblings. They all had music lessons and, after an initial wrangle with the cello, little Myra found she much preferred the piano. She was no prodigy – *'Gott sei dank, nein!'* ('Thank God, no!') she once expostulated – but her father was happy to find her performing opportunities and fine teachers. She entered the Royal Academy of Music aged only 12 and there studied with her mentor Tobias Matthay, whose emphasis on the weight of a relaxed arm helped to produce the distinctive open, rounded, singing sound that characterised many of his pupils, Hess included.

> Hess was already one of Britain's greatest pianists and an international star

It has often been assumed that a relaxed arm in a pianist is not compatible with virtuoso technique. As soon as Hess died in 1965, articles began to appear alleging that if pianists do not play virtuoso music, it is because they physically can't. Hess, however, had decided long ago that she only wanted to play the works she considered best. And what she liked most was Beethoven. Aged 18, she wrote an article called 'How to Play Beethoven', commenting: 'Beethoven is my favourite composer, because his works seem to appeal most strongly to my own temperament.' That alone should signal her true nature.

The notion that Hess could not play virtuosic works is baloney – as you can hear from her 1938 recording of Schumann's *Carnaval*, her searingly powerful live performances of Brahms's piano concertos, or APR's priceless set of live recordings from the University of Illinois

Indomitable personality: (main) Myra Hess at the piano in 1940; (left) composer Arnold Bax and pianist Harriet Cohen, the object of his infatuation

in 1949, which includes one of the most thrilling accounts I know of the Chopin F minor Fantasy. She had performed a Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody* as an 11-year-old schoolgirl; seven years later she made her Proms debut in 1908 in that composer's Piano Concerto No. 1. In New York, she played Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with the composer himself accompanying her at a second piano – and she had the chutzpah to go backstage at his next recital and tell him he had mislearned a note of *Carnaval* (he sent her a giant bouquet to thank her).

In her youth, Hess also played a great deal of contemporary music: Debussy, Ravel, Szymanowski, Benjamin Dale, Arnold Bax. It was for Hess that Bax wrote his first published piano piece, *Valse*; she was likewise the dedicatee, unlikely though it sounds, of *In a Vodka Shop*, one of several pieces he penned after visiting Ukraine. Bax (who was married with two small children) quickly became infatuated with the still-teenaged Harriet Cohen, but it was Hess who premiered *The Maiden with the Daffodil*, a work inspired by Cohen and dedicated 'To Tanya'. It is possible that Hess did not realise 'Tanya' was his nickname for Cohen. Regrettably, he was playing the two of them off against one another – and the two women, who had been friends, loathed one another for the rest of their lives.

Although she continued to play Bax's music well into the 1920s, Hess later jettisoned it from her repertoire, along with most French works, which she described as the shrimp cocktails of music: 'Every now and then I, too, like shrimp cocktails, but for a steady diet I prefer roast beef.'

Hess's other nemesis was Vladimir Horowitz; she worried about his 'pernicious' influence on the public's taste in pianism. She had no patience for what she perceived as virtuosity for its own sake. Her former pupil Stephen Kovacevich remembers her convincing him that speed in music is not necessarily what makes a performance exciting. Marshall Izen, in his notes for the APR Illinois set, commented that hearing Hess for the first time transformed the way he listened to pianists thereafter.

It was in the US that Hess had arguably her greatest success. She spent several months annually touring coast to coast; between 1922 and '39 she missed only one year, when her mother was terminally ill. She resumed her visits after World War II, continuing as long

Smokin': Hess at the keys in 1952

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Hess on record

Five fine performances

Bach/Hess Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring *(1928)*
Created just three years before she first recorded it, this transcription was Hess's smash hit. Listen for her open sound, her detailed control of voicing and her playing's remarkable state of grace.

Schumann Carnaval *(1938)*
Carl Friedberg, to whom Hess regularly played in the US, may have given her tips from his teachers, Clara Schumann and Brahms. This wonderfully characterised cavalcade is one of few recordings with which Hess was pleased.

Chopin Fantaisie in F minor *(Live at University of Illinois, 1949)*
A fire-and-brimstone account with a depth of colour, texture and pure drama resembling a canvas by Chopin's friend Delacroix. If this is how Hess played in concert, her studio recordings misrepresent her…

Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 (*New York Philharmonic/ Bruno Walter, 1951)*
A performance of power and grand-scale vision, the tenderest of slow movements and a sparkling sense of humour in the finale.

Beethoven Piano Sonata No. 31 *(1953)*
The narrative drive and oratorical phrasing of Hess's playing are peerless here. The sonata's trajectory of despair, strength and fugal triumph is powerfully articulated.

Heroine of the hour: Hess with BBC announcer Alvar Lidell in 1943, during a lunchtime concert at the National Gallery; (below) violinist and duo partner Jelly d'Arányi nicknamed Hess '*Pishkosz*' ('dirty' in Hungarian)

as her health allowed. Whether it was thanks to the adulation, the American-made Steinway pianos, the star treatment, the lavish dinners or the more demonstrative audiences, she played more freely and more dramatically there than at home. Britain had taken her for granted before World War II; afterwards, it mythologised her. That did little justice to her artistry. As Kovacevich puts it: 'She was not the girl next door, she was not auntie pouring tea and she was not the Queen Mother. Her Beethoven took no prisoners.'

The real Myra Hess was granite strong. She had become tough of necessity, first to break free from a dictatorial father who had encouraged her towards music only to be horrified when she turned professional. She then had to stick to her path despite early struggles with rock-bottom fees and misogynistic critics who seemed only to expect 'feminine charm' from a female pianist. As her career built, she encountered the kind of stress – travelling, concert nerves, loneliness and insecurity – that often fells the less resilient. One friend described Hess before concerts as 'pathologically nervous'. She was sociable; she disliked being alone. And she once acerbically told an interviewer: 'There are not more female pianists because most women are too sensible to wish to spend their lives on trains.'

Then at the National Gallery during the Blitz, she simply played on. When a doodle-bug bomb flew overhead, she made a *crescendo* in a Schubert Impromptu as it approached and a *diminuendo* as it faded into the distance. Her fellow musicians likewise kept going, with their audience following suit. Hess continued to grow with her experiences; by the end of her life, she was such an indomitable personality that her close friends scarcely dared to stand up to her.

Her personal life might seem an enigma. Post Bax, there probably was not much of it. She once said that she could not be earnest about more than one thing, which had to be playing the piano. She termed this a 'sacrifice' – and expected her musician friends and students to do the same. It is often assumed that she was lesbian, like many of her closest female friends; but her diaries included counter-indications. Once she mentions an American university president whom she deemed very attractive; and she termed her thespian friend Ronald Colman her 'pin-up'. There was something 'all or nothing' about Hess. She was married to her art.

She let off steam, however, with a startlingly earthy sense of humour. Her National Gallery right-hand man Howard Ferguson once said that the unrepeatable jokes circulating in the RAF had all originated with her (many of her National Gallery musicians were in the RAF band's orchestra). Her duo partner for over 20 years, the violinist Jelly d'Arányi, nicknamed her '*Pishkosz*', which means 'dirty' in Hungarian. Stories of her practical jokes are legion: performing the Chopin 'Black Key' Étude by rolling an orange over the notes, singing send-ups of Queen Victoria and Gounod arias or gatecrashing a Royal Academy competition in disguise to bash out terrible Bach.

I had a final surprise from the unsuspected Myra Hess, when I received a private copy of her penultimate broadcast: the Schubert B flat Piano Sonata, D960, plus the *Klavierstück*, D946 No. 2. This performance, on 10 December 1961, when she was facing critical health issues, made Howard Ferguson and the pianist Frank Mannheimer advise her to retire. Some of her friends agreed; some emphatically did not. She still had much to give, but in the ruthless musical world, that was not enough. A slight unsteadiness in the *Scherzo* seems to have been her undoing. I've heard worse mistakes from thicker-skinned pianists today, but no performance more meaningful than Hess's. She requested that the Schubert was not rebroadcast. I can't help hoping, though, that some day this extraordinary, devastating performance may reach the audience to which she had, with such anguish, to say goodbye.

Jessica Duchen's new biography, 'Myra Hess: National Treasure' is out now.

STEVE REICH
COLLECTED WORKS

STEVE REICH

COLLECTED WORKS

‘THERE’S JUST A HANDFUL OF LIVING COMPOSERS
WHO CAN LEGITIMATELY CLAIM
TO HAVE ALTERED THE DIRECTION OF MUSICAL HISTORY
AND STEVE REICH IS ONE OF THEM.’
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EXTRAORDINARY BOXSET,
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nonesuch

'Intensity and authority': Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau accompanied by pianist Gerald Moore c.1965; (below) recording in 1948

A voice for the ages

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's consummate artistry enthralled all who heard him sing. Andrew Green marks 100 years of the celebrated German baritone

The ability of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau to excite youthful minds is an intriguing measure of his unique talents. Daniel Barenboim was 'completely mesmerised' at age ten by a Fischer-Dieskau recital. The distinguished British tenors Ian Partridge and Ian Bostridge both had their moments of revelation while at school. 'The quality of his voice was something I'd never heard before, the warmth, the immediacy,' Partridge recalls of a Mahler recording. One Schubert track did it for Ian Bostridge: *Erlkönig*: 'It was the intensity and authority, the beauty of the voice.'

As a student in London in the 1960s, the soprano Teresa Cahill attended 'all Fischer-Dieskau's song recitals with [pianist] Gerald Moore. I had a respect and reverence for him that bordered on hero-worship.' Cahill would go on to work with Fischer-Dieskau twice. 'Those performances will stay in my memory forever. To have known him personally and performed with him represents the pinnacle of my career.'

The teenage Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau was himself a discophile, one element of an unquenchable thirst for classical music (as well as for art, theatre, poetry and books). His schoolteacher father, Albert Fischer-Dieskau, was a devoted musician, composer and sometime concert promoter. Dietrich's mother, Dora, was likewise in love with music, which adorned the family's life in Berlin. Fischer-Dieskau remembered his excitement at hearing Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* on the radio at age four. Piano studies rendered him a far more than competent player. The overarching bonus was the rich musical life of 1930s Berlin. All of this made Fischer-Dieskau the intensely musically aware individual he ever remained.

> 'The warmth and immediacy of his voice was something I had never heard before'

A teacher at 'Dieter's' secondary school decided the youngster had 'the voice of an angel' and singing seemed his most likely career by the age of 16. There weren't so many angels on the streets of Berlin, however, as Hitler's takeover of Germany unfolded. This young man of civilised sensibilities found Nazism at best uncouth and boorish. He was nonetheless forced to join the

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Hitler Youth movement. In 1943, after six months study at the music conservatoire in Berlin, he was drafted into the German army, serving in Russia and Italy. His lengthy incarceration in a POW camp was redeemed by the opportunity to perform music of all kinds for fellow prisoners. His eventual release enabled a return to (West) Germany in 1947.

Evidence for how remarkable the voice already was comes via the 1947 recording of Schubert's *Winterreise* made for the broadcaster RIAS in Berlin. Glitches in the recording process meant Fischer-Dieskau had to repeat the first eight songs, working into the night. Performances of deeper insight would follow, but what a mature and captivating voice already. At age 22.

Such quality guaranteed a rapid rise to fame in and beyond his native Germany, in concerts, recitals and opera performances. By 1952, Fischer-Dieskau was giving high-profile recitals with the British pianist Gerald Moore, who upon hearing 'one phrase' recognised the baritone as 'a master' . In cataloguing the singer's exceptional musical qualities, Moore decided 'the key to Fischer-Dieskau's supremacy' was his projection of rhythm. 'He is the master of it.'

That point is made in just the two minutes of Fischer-Dieskau's recording (with Moore) of Schubert's *Der Musensohn* ('The Muse's Son'). So much else is on show, though. Like one of his heroes, the legendary conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, Fischer-Dieskau sought out the emotions that inhabit a composer while writing music, but also excavated the poet's emotions. For Teresa Cahill, 'No other singer at that time had his unique mix of talents – a gorgeous voice allied to musicality and musicianship, sensitive imagination [and] a formidable technique with which to communicate his ideas. In my view, the greatest performing artist of his generation.'

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> 'No other singer had his unique mix of talents – a gorgeous voice, sensitive imagination and a formidable technique'

The new long-playing, hi-fi disc promoted Fischer-Dieskau's charisma internationally. While researching singers working during the early LP years, Open University lecturer Terence Curran learnt from Fischer-Dieskau how swiftly he embraced the new recording technology. 'He instinctively understood how to adapt to singing into a microphone. His attention to detail meant he'd instruct even the legendary producer Walter Legge how things should be done at a recording session, much to Legge's annoyance.'

How to even begin summing up the vast range of highest-level work which represents Fischer-Dieskau's subsequent career? A task made all the trickier given that, as Ian Bostridge observes, 'He took on an extraordinary amount each year.' In the area of recital repertoire you 'merely' start with Schubert, Schumann, Brahms… not forgetting Wolf, who you could almost believe was writing expressly for Fischer-Dieskau. But what adventure beyond that. Try, for example, his bewitching album of rarely heard Haydn songs. The vast amount of concert repertoire ranged from Bach and Handel to many a contemporary composer.

The area, perhaps, in danger of being overlooked nowadays is Fischer-Dieskau's dedication to opera. His stage appearances encompassed Mozart, Verdi and Wagner roles, plus forays into the likes of Puccini, Richard Strauss and new opera. If he didn't please everyone all of the time, his many recordings

Crystal clear: (anti-clockwise left) Fischer-Dieskau performs Britten's *War Requiem* at Coventry Cathedral, 1962; soprano Teresa Cahill first heard him in the 1960s, and would later work with him; tenor Ian Bostridge is an admirer; as Mandryka in Strauss's *Arabella*, London, 1965

rarely demonstrate anything other than utterly committed, sharply defined characterisations.

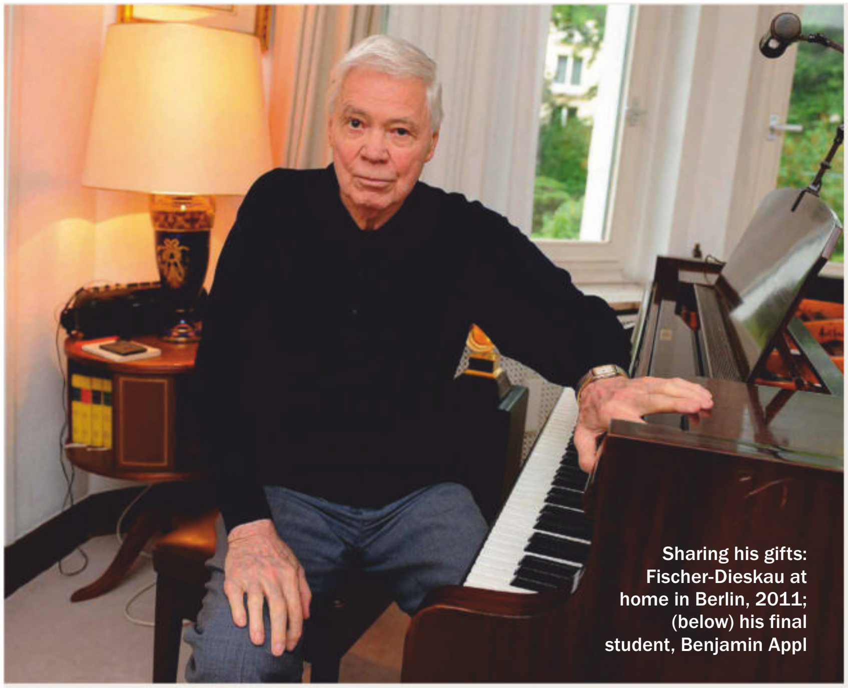
So, what of Fischer-Dieskau's appearances in the UK, masterminded by the energetic and witty concert agent Emmie Tillett? He made his British debut in June 1951, singing the German text of Delius's *A Mass of Life* under Thomas Beecham. To this he brought 'immense conviction', said *The Times* critic. This was a voice featuring 'a remarkable range of colours'. An Edinburgh Festival debut in 1952 followed, *The Scotsman* describing Fischer-Dieskau as 'holding the packed audience spellbound'.

1962 saw the world premiere, at Coventry Cathedral, of Britten's *War Requiem*, the baritone part written expressly for Fischer-Dieskau by one of his greatest admirers. The young Tony Palmer, later a celebrated documentary maker, was present. 'The work flattened me. I recall so clearly Fischer-Dieskau's final duet with Peter Pears, portraying the dead British and German soldiers. His quiet singing was astonishing, the words crystal clear.'

As a member of the Highgate School choir, composer John Rutter sang in the 1963 recording of the *War Requiem*. 'Fischer-Dieskau's singing was unutterably moving. Imagine this musical reconciliation of a baritone conscripted into the German army and the soprano soloist, Galina Vishnevskaya, whose Soviet Union was devastated by the Nazis.'

An overdue Covent Garden debut came in 1965, a portrayal of Mandryka in Richard Strauss's *Arabella* under Solti. 'Some of the finest baritone tone ever heard at the Garden,' said *The Stage.* 1968 was marked by the celebrated (and commercially recorded) Festival Hall concert of captivating duets with Janet Baker, Daniel Barenboim at the piano. Fischer-Dieskau held Dame Janet in the very highest regard. At his death in 2012, she expressed the view that, 'To my generation, he was something so special that one was always awestruck.'

On and on, to the unforgettable London recitals across the 1980s, partnered mainly by Hartmut Höll but also by Alfred Brendel, whose Covent Garden *Winterreise* with Fischer-Dieskau 'sent shivers down the spine' of Tony Palmer. Höll says he learnt from Fischer-Dieskau's vast experience the balance required between preparation and spontaneity. 'A work has been studied and understood, the inner structure built. Now I can express myself freely, and yet feel in every moment that it can only be as it is right now, amid the infinite possibilities.' ▶



Sharing his gifts: Fischer-Dieskau at home in Berlin, 2011; (below) his final student, Benjamin Appl

Lessons with the master

Baritone Benjamin Appl remembers his important mentor

I studied with Mr Fischer-Dieskau for three years at his homes in Berlin and Bavaria until a few weeks before he died. Very often, the atmosphere created between teacher and student is the secret to a successful and harmonious relationship. That was the case here – a connection, a feeling, which took over both body and mind. Occasionally it was how he looked at me that helped my understanding. Sometimes he sang along with me.

Dieter was so dedicated to painting. Working with him taught me that in preparing a song I need to select and mix 'colours', all of which can be found in life. Perhaps it's seeing someone unusual in the street, or a magical moment in nature. He encouraged me to read biographies of poets and composers, and study the period in which the music was written.

Teaching into later life mattered so much to him. Once when I was studying in London, he called to say we'd work on Brahms's *Serious Songs* the following Tuesday. I had to say, 'Mr Fischer-Dieskau, I'm sorry but I can't come then.' He hung up and called again: 'What about Wednesday?' I said the same thing. Then another call: 'So we work on something else?' He was a little child-like, wanting his own way, but that made him more human and loveable.

I feel privileged to have had access to Dieter's letters and diaries. I now see how much he struggled with the worry that he wasn't good enough. On my last visit to his home, he was depressed. He cried a lot in the lessons. I felt it should perhaps be the last time I came, to give space to him and his wife, but she said, 'No, you must come back. The thing he looks forward to is the lessons with you.' He felt the absence of many friends with whom he'd lost contact after he stopped singing.

I still felt that could be the last time I'd see Dieter, so I wrote him a very long letter, thanking him for the experiences we had shared and for all I'd learned from him. A few weeks later, I learned that he'd passed away.

This centenary recording and concert project of mine carries both a personal and public dedication to this fine artist. I invite no comparison between my voice and that of Fischer-Dieskau. I remain inspired by Dieter both from our time together and his recordings. This new album celebrates his enormous legacy in his 100th year.

Appl's album 'To Dieter: The Past and Future' is out on Alpha Classics on 23 May. Benjamin Appl and pianist James Baillieu present tribute performances to Fischer-Dieskau at the Aldeburgh Festival, 22-24 June.

Perfect partners: with Brendel in 1979

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A joy to play with

Pianist Alfred Brendel

'We performed our first *Winterreise* at New York's Carnegie Hall, and it was virtually without rehearsal,' remembers pianist Alfred Brendel about working with Fischer-Dieskau. 'Even at improvised performances, his command was impeccable. In our collaboration we were always partners, and it was mainly due to him that the perception of the "accompanist" that had still applied to Gerald Moore vanished.

'Fischer-Dieskau was one of the very few singers who performed German lieder internationally in big, packed halls, his diction able to reach the last row. In lieder, the words should remain clearly articulated in the foreground – listen to the early recordings of *Winterreise* by Lotte Lehmann or Peter Anders from the mid-20th century: there is a "three-dimensional" quality in their diction.

'Some of Schubert's greatest creations point to an almost expressionist range. While some fine singers could suggest a continuous intimacy, Fischer-Dieskau at his best encompassed a world. I particularly remember our performance [of *Winterreise*] at Covent Garden for this comprehensiveness. He was phenomenal.'

An enduring love: Fischer-Dieskau with fourth wife, soprano Júlia Várady, in 2003

In these later years, Fischer-Dieskau's voice of course showed its age, but his ability to encompass the heart and soul of a song continued developing, leaving regular observers like *The Times's* Hilary Finch piling up the plaudits. For her, he was 'that most literate of lieder singers'. Ians Bostridge and Partridge emphasise how Fischer-Dieskau's ability to deliver a breathtaking *pianissimo* remained undimmed. 'It lifted you out of your seat,' says Partridge. 'You really could have heard pins dropping,' adds Bostridge.

> 'He created a unity between text and music unlike few before or after him'

The argument in some quarters that Fischer-Dieskau's delivery of words was over-articulated? 'An almost violent form of expression,' argued one commentator. 'No way,' says Ian Bostridge. 'What he did was make words truly live. Remember, though, that even in Schubert's day there was controversy over whether his songs should be sung "straight" or conveying the singer's personality.'

For Daniel Barenboim, Fischer-Dieskau created 'a unity between text and music unlike few before or after him'. One of the baritone's pupils, Hanno Müller-Brachmann, says there's no debate to be had. 'Fischer-Dieskau offered what he had to offer. He was simply being who he was. We don't need to be judgmental. Different singers offer me different types of inspiration.'

The one tragedy among so many Fischer-Dieskau triumphs was the all-too-early death in 1963 of his beloved first wife, the accomplished cellist Irmgard Poppen. 'Two lives threaded into one,' was how the baritone described their relationship. Two false-start marriages followed before his enduring, fulfilling relationship with the soprano Júlia Várady.

Fischer-Dieskau met Irmgard ('Irmel') when Berlin was still one entity. And there was surely no more emotional late-career occasion than Fischer-Dieskau's first concert in East Berlin, a 1986 recital with Hartmut Höll. Says Höll, 'I can still feel the attention with which the audience took in every note. Every musical nuance had a personal meaning. Longings were fulfilled, dreams came true and new ones arose.' The curtain then came down on Fischer-Dieskau's singing career in December 1992, after an opera gala honouring conductor Wolfgang Sawallisch.

All this, and no space to do justice to Fischer-Dieskau's significant forays into conducting, his commitment to teaching... and to painting, which was far more than a pastime. Through it all, as everyone who knew him testifies, he had no airs and graces. In Teresa Cahill's experience of concerts with him, 'He was polite, kind, most warm and generous, unassuming and modest – which I didn't really expect.'

On his visit to interview Fischer-Dieskau, Terence Curran nonetheless picked up an additional dimension. 'I had this sad, poignant sense from him that he feared he'd be completely forgotten.' No chance of that. None at all.

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Light Stories
Matthew Barley

Pieces of me

Cellist Matthew Barley's *Light Stories* project has helped him to work through trauma dating back to a psychotic event in his teens, as he tells Ariane Todes

It would be simplistic and even trite to claim that art saves us or makes all our problems go away. Some trauma is too profound. But sometimes it can be part of a journey through that trauma. This is the case for cellist Matthew Barley, whose own mental health issues began at school, were buried for decades, and re-emerged last year in the cathartic form of *Light Stories*. Alone on stage save for the box of electronic tricks beneath his feet, and with the background video art of a man dancing and writhing, he plays a programme ranging from JS Bach to his own compositions, itself formed around the structure of 'voyage and return'. The project made its debut last year with the release of an album and performances at Queen Elizabeth Hall. It continues its journey this month on tour around the UK.

Music came easily to Barley. He describes his early years in Sheffield: 'There was an incredible Music Service. There were three or four Friday night orchestras, Saturday morning recorder consorts, chamber groups, and everything was free – even my cello and cello lessons. I wasn't so serious that I'd go and practise 15 hours a day, but I enjoyed it so much. I lived through it and learnt the joy of making music with other people.'

He was also born with a natural facility, although he admits this allowed him to slack off somewhat: 'I was incredibly lazy until the age of 30. One of my problems was that I was talented. I was the one who could learn a concerto in three days and a cadenza on the day of a performance. If I hadn't been so quick I would have been forced to work more, but I could always get away with it. In a way it was a disadvantage, as my playing was never really high quality.' He was good enough to get into the National Youth Orchestra and Chetham's School of Music, but this talent didn't protect him from being bullied at school in Sheffield – often to the extent of fearing for his life – or falling in with the wrong crowd there.

> 'I feel more whole than I've ever felt in my life – and sometimes more miserable as well'

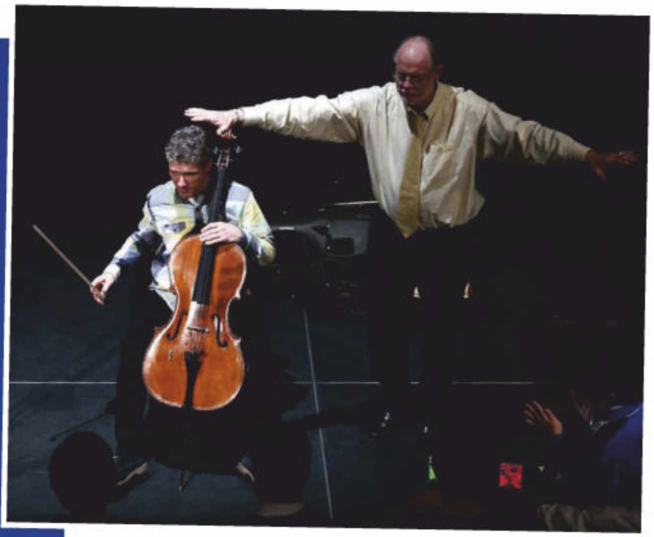
Aged 16, home one weekend from Chetham's, he experienced a drug-induced psychotic episode that led to him attempting to take his own life. As was the way back in the '80s, surface normality was maintained. 'I was driven back to school the next day and just got on with it,' he says. 'There was no therapy, no conversations.'

The episode wasn't spoken about again, and he went on to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Moscow Conservatoire, and to forge a career as a soloist and chamber musician, working on diverse projects and collaborations, often with his wife, the violinist Viktoria Mullova. As he looks back, he understands there was something missing, though: 'In my twenties there was a membrane between me and the world, always something between me and everything I did. I wasn't fully engaged.'

It took a terrifying psychedelic trip in 2019 to force him to confront his buried trauma – one he took in a controlled way as part of an

A kaleidoscope of emotion: Matthew Barley has faced buried trauma through his *Light Stories* project (inset); (opposite) Barley and conductor John Lubbock teach autistic children to conduct in Hong Kong, 2015

NICK WHITE, GETTY



ayahuasca ceremony, which caused him to suffer a flashback to the original experience. The breakthrough led him to seek therapy, but a specific kind of trauma therapy – Somatic Experiencing. He explains the theory: 'If you're being attacked and are scared for your life, you shut down and concentrate on what you have to do. Bits of your system separate and parts of your body get locked in at that point. Trauma therapy is able to unlock them.'

It doesn't necessarily involve talking, or even focus on the trauma itself, but the two years leading up to it: 'Rather than telling a story about it, I had to bring up a little one-line memory, stop and explore everything that was happening in my body in detail. You start scanning from the top of your head and describe every sensation you feel – physical, colour, texture. I experienced powerful memories of what had happened beforehand, with my parents splitting up, being bullied at school, being terrified every day.'

As a result of the therapy, he says, 'I feel more whole than I've ever felt in my life. I sometimes feel more miserable. So many times in the last five years I've been feeling something and I'll have a response that I've heard other people talking about for years, but never felt myself.'

He began to find ways to express this story through music. He related it to one of the classic story archetypes – voyage and return (think *Magic Flute, Flying Dutchman, Hansel and Gretel* and any number of operas). He started off with the idea of five chapters of 15 sections, from 'the journey begins' to 'things begin to fall apart', 'healing' and finally 'return'. He either found suitable repertoire from composers (Bach, Elgar, Giovanni Sollima, Jan Bang, Anna Meredith, Joby Talbot and John Metcalfe) or wrote his own new compositions, making use of multitracking, synthesizer, percussion, keyboards and even Brazilian birdcall pipes.

This was his first time composing and he immersed himself in the experience: 'I was

All aglow: performing *Light Stories*

Creative kids

Barley's foundation

Matthew Barley started his own foundation in 2022, bringing creative musical play to university settings to support students with mental health problems. The workshops involve three days of creating new music and discussing mental health, culminating in a performance of *Light Stories*. They are still in their pilot form – the final pilot takes place this month at University College London.

'I find myself talking more and more about how important creativity is,' says Barley. 'Young children spend large parts of their day, if not all day, making stuff up – whether it's conversations, songs or games. They are so endlessly creative. In a practical sense, creativity is part of the human condition. It's just what we all do.'

He describes the outcome of a recent workshop: 'I said to the students, "Let's make stuff up. Don't sweat. You're not trying to change the world. You're just trying to have a good time making music." They were so up for that, and we had an amazing time. Just seeing the body language and joy of those people together was worthwhile. And while I'm not trying to change the world, I probably am a bit. I want to get the message across about how healthy it is to make up music.'

MADELEINE FARLEY

Positive vibes: soaking up the wonders of the natural world on Aldeburgh beach

learning to use the technology, to produce and to write – I had composition lessons. And then I had to learn the pieces I'd written and record them. That process went on for a year, living it every day. It was wonderful to be so immersed.'

The process also connected him with a discipline he thought he never had: 'What has struck me in the last year is that I do have a work ethic and it's my best friend. I enjoyed getting up early in the morning, doing ten minutes of stretches and getting straight into writing music.'

> 'I had to challenge my own resistance. It's not a shameful story. It's an amazing journey'

Since the project had its first public airing last year, Barley has been remarkably frank, sharing the very personal details of his story across classical music journals, men's websites and mental health podcasts. When he embarked on the journey, he wasn't intending to be so open, but he was given encouragement by promoters and colleagues. He felt his own resistance, but then, 'I realised that the main reason stopping me was shame – that drugs and a suicide attempt were showing weakness. I had to challenge that way of thinking by telling the story. It's not a story about shame. It's an amazing journey.'

What does it feel like, on stage, all alone but for pedals and a video screen behind him? He keeps his eyes shut for most of the performance – what is he actually experiencing internally? 'I had a Q&A about it, and someone asked what's going on in my head, and I had to disappoint them,' he says. 'In that particular concert, I was just praying that the technology would be all right. I'm really listening and concentrating very hard.'

The main word he uses to describe how he feels at the end of the performance is 'nourished'. 'People have been so interested and sympathetic. I've been quite overwhelmed by the response. There is something about sharing it all in musical terms, with people listening and responding, "Thank you, that was good to hear."'

What does he recommend for staying mentally healthy? Firstly, he advocates for seeing mental and physical health as two sides of the same coin. 'We talk about "physical" and "mental" which is unhelpful, because it separates us into different parts. Even the medical profession is starting to say that we have to see ourselves as one entity. And that involves both physical and mental health. People don't have a problem working on their physical health, so why should they have problems working on their mental health?'

Ultimately, it's fairly simple: 'If you sleep well, eat well, you're not involved in any addiction and you get decent exercise and contact with nature and friends, the chances are you're already quite a long way there. The other thing is talking to people, and one of the best ways of doing that is making stuff together, like we did when we were kids – making up games in the playground.' And so, maybe music ultimately allows us to return to those innocent, creative days of childhood – the ultimate voyage and return story.

Barley performs Light Stories during May in Wavendon, Leeds, Windermere, Glasgow, York and Nottingham. Full details: www.matthewbarley.com

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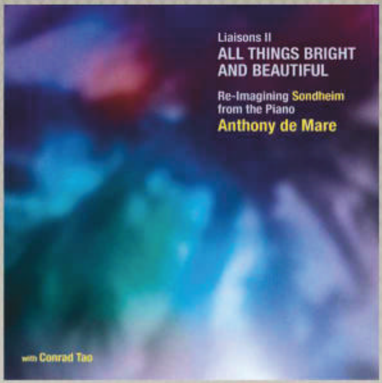

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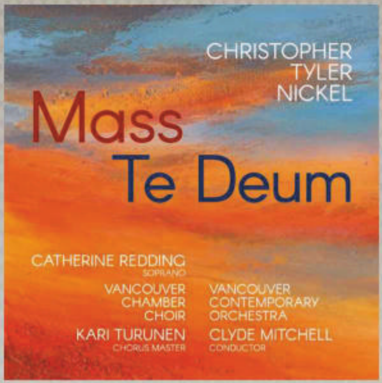

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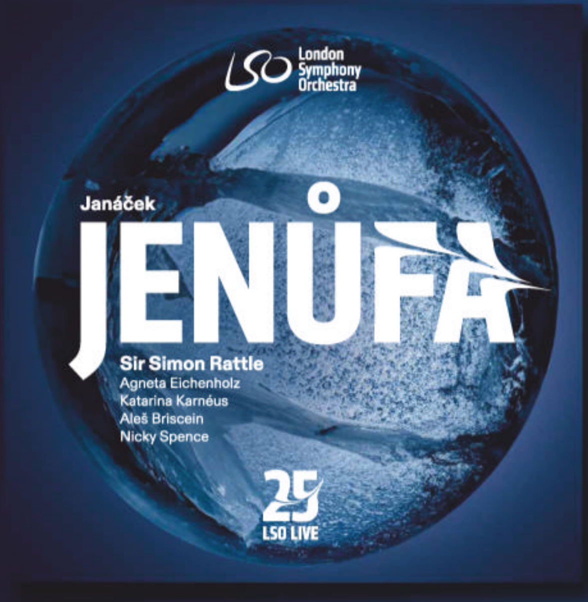

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Man on a mission

For American composer Carlos Simon, highlighting injustice and racism through his art is a personal calling, as he tells Clive Paget

The autumn of 1838 was unbearably bleak for the 272 enslaved African American men, women and children herded onto ships at a busy wharf in Washington DC. Bound for the unforgiving plantations of the Deep South, the human cargo was being sold by Jesuit priests to ensure the financial future of what would become Georgetown University. It's a harrowing tale to address through music, but that's what Carlos Simon, one of America's most original Black composers, did in his 2020 *Requiem for the Enslaved*. That Simon is now an associate professor at Georgetown is a bittersweet irony.

The *Requiem*'s richly affecting soundworld is rooted in the composer's Pentecostal upbringing, drawing on African American spirituals, Catholic liturgical melodies and with an evocative text by hip-hop artist Marco Pavé. The album earned Simon a 2023 Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition, just one of a string of recent accolades.

This April sees a similarly ambitious fusion as Simon channels gospel and jazz in his *Good News Mass*, a celebration of Black joy and the power of faith. Commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, it will be conducted by music and artistic director Gustavo Dudamel. For such a prestigious opportunity, it's only natural they should approach Simon, a thoughtful and talented musician whose initial three-year residency at the beleaguered Kennedy Center has already been extended to 2027 while also

Activist instinct: (left) hip-hop artist and collaborator Marco Pavé; (below) composer and inspiration William Grant Still; (opposite below) at the Grammys in 2023

GETTY

occupying the Boston Symphony Orchestra's inaugural composer chair.

Born in 1986, Simon was raised in Atlanta, the son of a preacher. Religion and faith have remained at the heart of his life with music, and especially gospel, a key ingredient from the start. 'Music was everywhere,' he says, chatting over Zoom from Indianapolis where he's workshopping a new opera. 'In my family everybody does something. They sing or play piano; it's like a part of the DNA.' Gospel's prominence was partly because it was the only genre allowed in the house. 'I did sneak some things in, like jazz,' he laughs infectiously. 'And of course friends were listening to R&B and hip-hop. I love that music – especially Kendrick Lamar – but even now I find myself gravitating back to gospel. It's amazing how early experiences impact the rest of your life.'

By the time he started taking piano lessons at the age of ten, Simon was already an experienced church keyboard player, having absorbed his craft on the job. 'That's how my folks learned, you know, by plucking things out of the piano and using their ears to learn songs. It's a long tradition: the men in the family start churches and then they have a lot of children. My great-grandfather, who started a church in 1927, had 12 children. And my grandfather, who started his church in 1967, had seven. And I'm the eldest of five, right? Each generation passed information down, musically, and that's how I learned.'

Back then, Simon would never know who was going to stand up during a service or what they were going to sing, let alone what key they were going to sing it in. It was how he picked up chord structures and harmonies. 'It wasn't until later in high school, when I started to learn music theory, that I had a name to signify these notes I was playing: "Okay, that's a C major chord, or a Neapolitan. All right, cool, but I've been playing that for the last six or seven years."'

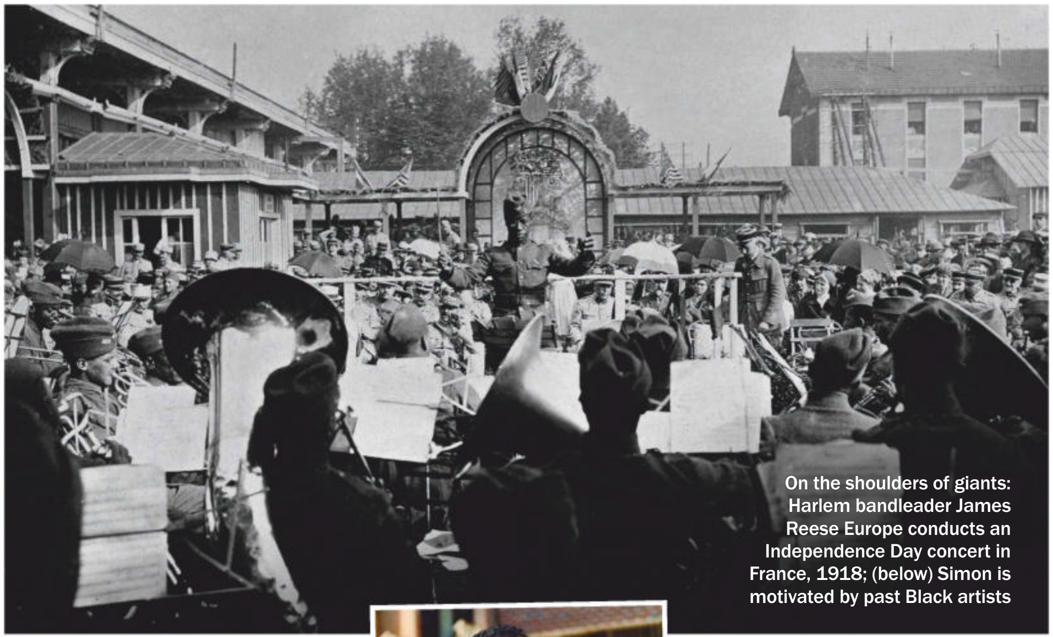
> Even now I find myself gravitating back to gospel. It's amazing how early experiences impact on how you spend the rest of your life

Simon counts himself blessed to have gone to Morehouse College, a liberal arts school and alma mater of celebrated African Americans from Martin Luther King Jr to filmmaker Spike Lee. There he fell in love with Bach, before transitioning to Beethoven sonatas. His habit of improvising, however, didn't always go down well. 'My teacher was like, "You can't do that!" But when he saw that I was doing things on my own, he said, "Okay, maybe you should just write your own music."'

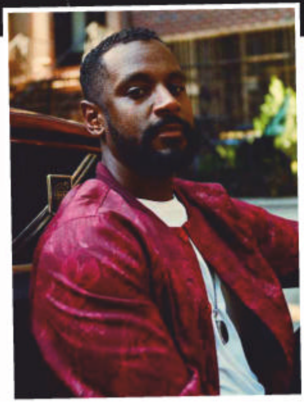
Graduate study at Georgia State University was supplemented in time by a doctorate at the University of Michigan. As a student, he quickly became interested in classical musicians who were thinking outside of the box – mavericks, like William Bolcom, or earlier composers like William Grant Still and Margaret Bonds who were using African American musical idioms in the classical space. 'It gave me permission to really dig deep and to push the envelope,' he says. 'At the time I was writing pieces in the style of Mozart or Bartók, until I came to study with the composer Nickitas Demos. He heard me playing gospel music on the piano one day and said, "Why don't you write music like that? Because that's who you are."'

Listening to Simon's music, you are struck by the sheer range of influences, a powerful emotional directness rooted in melody and the craft required to corral them into a cohesive whole that ensures nothing ever comes across as scattergun. The message, too, is important, whether in his *Elegy* for string quartet honouring Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Eric Garner – three Black men shot dead by police officers – or reflecting on the murder of George Floyd in *brea(d)th*, a powerful 2023 work for orchestra and chorus.

Hellfighters' Blues, premiered as part of the 2024 Last Night of the Proms, pays homage to trailblazing Harlem bandleader James Reese Europe while celebrating Black music as a form of cultural exchange. And only Simon could have written *Troubled Water,* a trombone concerto inspired by the Underground Railroad. The music includes echoes of Harriet Tubman's clandestine owl calls and a spiritual that suggests the rivers traversed by men and women



On the shoulders of giants: Harlem bandleader James Reese Europe conducts an Independence Day concert in France, 1918; (below) Simon is motivated by past Black artists



desperate to avoid detection by tracking dogs and slavecatchers.

The activist instinct has been baked into Simon from his Morehouse College days. 'The culture there allowed me to see myself as a Black American, a Black person in the world,' he says. 'People who are preachers, or people who are businessmen and women use whatever platform they have as a means of social change and activism. Even my music now, it's a form of preaching, and I take it seriously because it can help people.'

He's equally honest about the need to reconcile activism with his religion. 'There was a time I was really wrestling with the dogma, particularly the conservative side of things, where it's against same-sex marriage or being pro-life versus pro-choice,' he admits. 'But music has always been a connector for me. I've written operas that show how relationships impact a family which does not necessarily agree with a lifestyle of homosexuality.'

The last five years represent a watershed in the fortunes of Black musicians of all generations. Simon himself is a prominent member of a collective dubbed 'The Blacknificent 7' (see box), a trailblazing network born out of a group-chat that includes many of today's leading Black composers. Their work, often tapping into the African American historical experience, is typified by works like Simon's *Good News Mass*.

It's a sign of the respect he commands on the new music scene that the LA Phil commission gave him pretty much carte blanche. 'I thought about the church and how gospel music has helped me and many others throughout the world and said, "I want to write a mass influenced by gospel, but that showcases the orchestra and uses soloists and the Hammond organ, which I grew up playing,"' he explains. 'I want people to feel like they are in a church, so I asked the orchestra to commission a filmmaker to give us the sense that we are in a sacred space, in the presence of something loving, something that is higher than us. You may not believe in God, but my hope is that you feel love.'

It's just one of a string of major commissions on Simon's desk, including a Double Concerto for violinist Hillary Hahn and cellist Seth Parker Woods, to be premiered in Washington next year, and *In the Rush*, with a libretto by Ruby Aiyo Gerber and Lynn Nottage, scheduled for the Metropolitan Opera in 2027. 'The story is based in the future in a city much like New Orleans that has been flooded because of climate change,' he reveals.

Despite his current fortunes, however, Simon is taking nothing for granted. 'I grew up with the notion that, particularly in classical music, it would be very difficult as a Black creative to have your work performed and for it be celebrated,' he admits. 'Racism has kept a lot of great music from being appreciated, like the work of William Grant Still and Florence Price who lived in the 1930s when Black people were being lynched.

'I am the beneficiary of the hard work of many Black composers over the years,' he adds. 'I'm doing what I can now so we can leave the door open for others. It's about art really reflecting our society, and music made by Black creatives should not be excluded because of race.'

Hip young voice: Damien Geter

Collective agenda

The Blacknificent 7

Russia had 'The Five' (or 'The Mighty Handful'); France had Les Six. And now the US has a composer collective known as The Blacknificent 7.

First up is Jasmine Barnes. Born in Baltimore, she has written five operas. Her song cycle, *A Sable Jubilee*, can be heard on Will Liverman's album, *Show Me the Way* on Cedille. *An African American Requiem* is the best-known work by Damien Geter. His *Gentle lady, do not sing* can be heard on a recent Signum disc of James Joyce settings.

Jessie Montgomery (above) grew up in New York and has been commissioned by everybody from the New York Philharmonic to the Chicago Symphony. Her portrait disc on Azica Records features orchestral gems. Chicago-based Nigerian-American Shawn Okpebholo's album on Cedille features *Songs in Flight*, a cycle inspired by advertisements for enslaved men and women on the run.

Born in Chattanooga, Dave Ragland's songs can be heard on *Dear Friends & Gentle Hearts* on Albany. Finally, born in the Bahamas but based in Houston, Joel Thompson won a 2018 American Prize for his *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*. Sasha Cooke features one of his song on her Pentatone album *How Do I Find You*.

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Sound advice

Canada's National Arts Centre is serious about education – and its flagship Orchestra is training the next crop of top musicians, writes Charlotte Smith

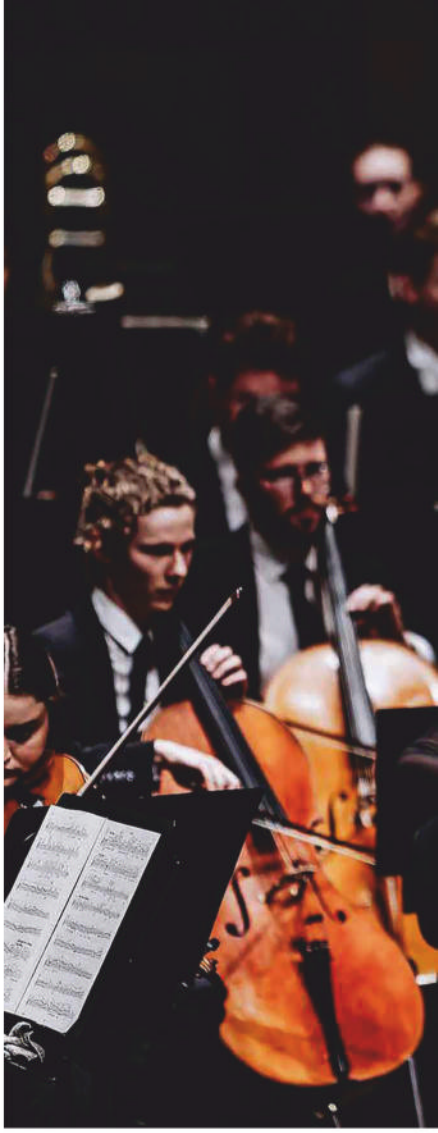
Say the phrase 'teaching hospital' and what comes to mind? Earnest young medics in white coats with clipboards, eager to hone their skills… Perhaps, if you're from a certain generation, the young Dr Carter serving his surgical residency under a scowling and exacting Dr Benton in the hugely popular Chicago-based 1990s TV series *ER*. What probably won't leap to mind is music and the arts. And yet a teaching hospital is exactly how those in charge of the National Arts Centre (NAC) in Ottawa, Canada, view their mission.

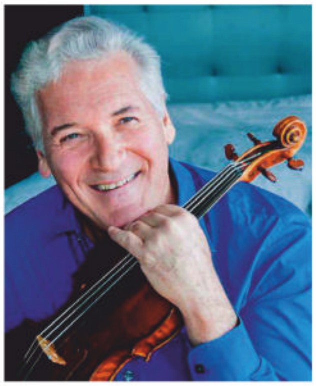
'Everything we touch, every production we stage, should encompass personal development,' says Nelson McDougall, NAC managing director. 'There aren't a lot of programmes like ours in the world – not filling those important gaps for young professionals.' These days, of course, you'd be hard pressed to find an orchestra or opera house *without* an education and outreach division – and the great majority of arts institutions understand the value of making cultural connections, serving their local community and enriching lives. But the NAC is different. Here, under the leadership of its president Christopher Deacon, personal development informs all programming, touring and commissioning throughout its integrated theatre, dance and music divisions. And nowhere is the teaching hospital concept better encapsulated than in the NAC's Orchestra, launched in 1969, and its Mentorship Program.

'I can't think of a human endeavour that comes anywhere close to being in an orchestra,' Alexander Shelley, NAC Orchestra music director for the past decade (and son of eminent pianist Howard) tells me. 'It's a microcosm of the kind of society we'd like to live in. Everybody is empowered and expected to be the best version of themselves. They each put in 10,000 hours of focused work to become a master of what they do, but now all that work is put to the service of the collective. Across a performance there are tens upon tens of thousands of notes, and when you think that the error rate is a thousandth of a percentage point, we're talking about the most extraordinary human mechanism.'

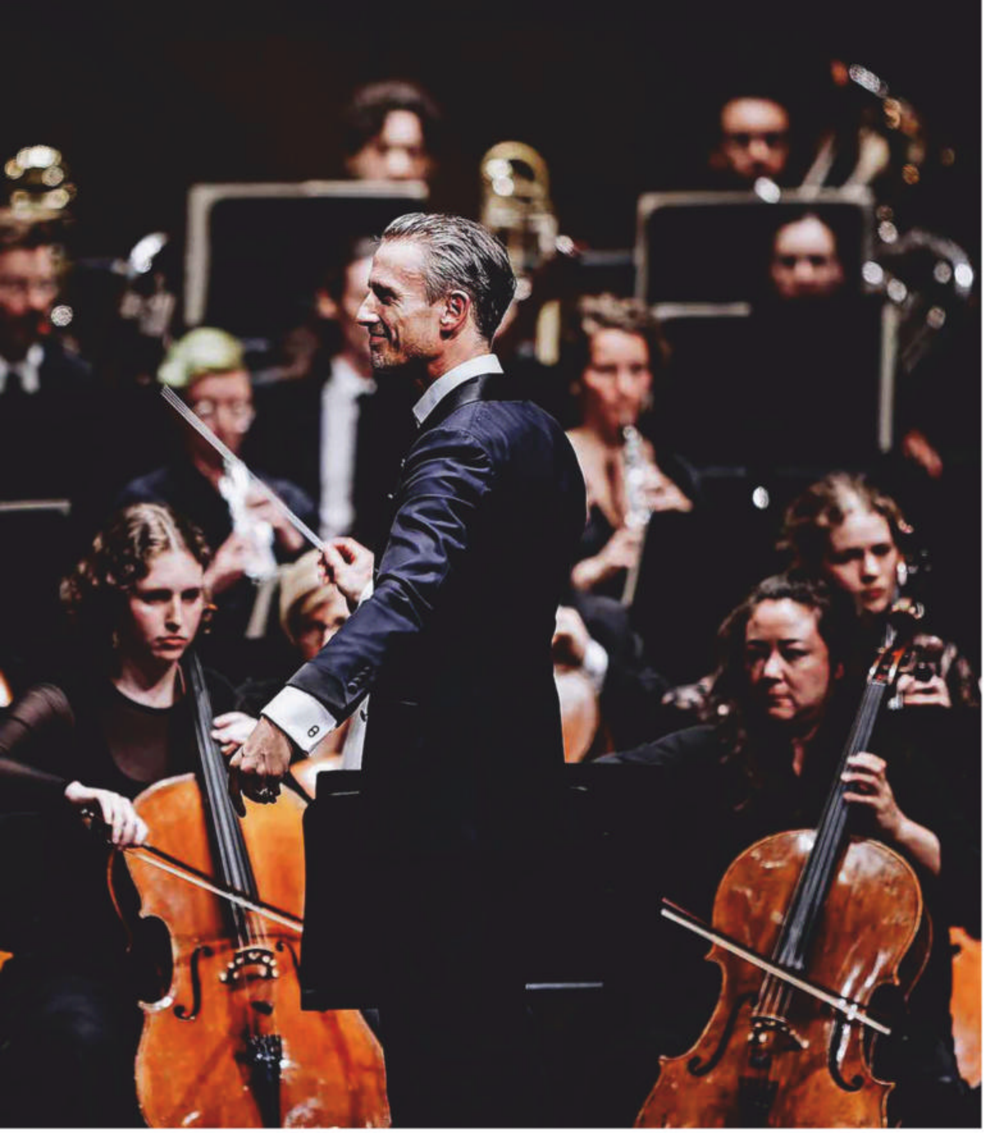
> 'In an orchestra we're all empowered and expected to be the best version of ourselves'

It was under Shelley's direction that the Mentorship Program, free and open to international candidates over the age of 18, was launched in 2022, as a way of addressing gaps in orchestral training provided by specialist music colleges and academies. 'I remember finding it odd as a student that particularly among string players, where 99.9 per cent of them would likely end up in an orchestra or teaching, that the act of being an orchestral musician was never really taught,' he explains. Unlike other side-by-side orchestral training schemes run by orchestras for budding professionals around the world, Shelley's annual three-week programme for around 50 orchestral players is a fully comprehensive package – pairing each player with a professional mentor in the orchestra and providing the opportunity to perform in two





CURTIS PERRY, CHERYL MAZAK



A big happy family: (main pic) conductor Alexander Shelley with the NAC Orchestra; (below) concertmaster Yosuke Kawasaki with a 2024 mentee; (opposite) former music director Pinchas Zukerman; trumpeter Karen Donnelly

NAC concerts as part of the orchestra's main subscription season.

'My predecessor was Pinchas Zukerman,' says Shelley, 'and he had a very clear idea of sound production. So, I inherited this wonderfully rich and agile orchestra, and it was my job to cultivate that. NACO is such a fabulous ensemble, very disciplined and tight, with superb intonation. So I thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful for aspiring orchestral musicians to come here and learn."'

The young mentees are put through their paces – in key moments of orchestral literature in the first week, and in repertoire to be performed in two public concerts in weeks two and three (in June 2025, Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, among other works). These final two weeks mimic the 'unfiltered rhythm' of the professional orchestra, says Shelley, so 'the young musicians are expected to perform at the same level as our players. This gives them insight into what will be expected in the profession.'

Throughout the process there are also sectional rehearsals, mock auditions, career talks, masterclasses and guidance for maintaining physical wellness and good mental health, 'because the psychology of being a member of a group throughout your career can be very challenging,' explains Shelley.

One person who has observed the programme's growth from the outset is principal trumpeter Karen Donnelly, who has performed with the NAC Orchestra for 28 years. She stresses that educational activities 'have always been an important focus for the institution,' whether playing for its home audience in Ottawa or on tour around Canada and overseas. The Mentorship Program was, however, 'years in the making, trying to make sure we weren't replicating something that already existed'.

Auditions for the scheme, she tells me, are conducted by each section of the orchestra according to instrument type, and are done blind via video recording to avoid bias. What qualities are she and her colleagues looking for? 'The level is incredibly high,' she informs me. 'Obviously, we need to hear the magic three components: pitch, timing and rhythm. But we also think about sound, as the orchestra has quite a refined and agile approach, and a warmer brass timbre than perhaps other bigger and louder ensembles.'

That each mentee has an individual mentor means that feedback can be given consistently and in real time during rehearsals, and this is key to ensuring that mentees quickly match the standard of the professional players. Advice ▶

Perfect circle: Shelley conducting

Podium charisma

A teachable skill?

Conductors command the respect of their orchestra with everything from humour to terror – though these days, the likes of George Szell are thankfully a rarer breed. But how to teach that all-important charisma to tomorrow's podium stars?

For Alexander Shelley, it's all about the music: 'I believe Picasso talked about visual artists spending years trying to draw the perfect circle, and that their artistry was defined by deviation,' he says. 'I think that's such a beautiful analogy for interpretation. As conductors we're interpretative artists, trying to get closer to the intellectual truth behind a piece of music – that perfect circle of complete comprehension.

'But any conductor will approach the work through the prism of their individuality, which automatically creates an interpretation. So as long as you're authentic, rigorous and genuine as a conductor, the audience and the orchestra will sense that. Whether they like it or not is up to them. You might be concerned with the audience thinking you look great, or with the orchestra liking you, and pretending to be someone else might be a shortcut to success, but it won't be the route to fulfilment. When I'm working with conductors, I talk about that a lot.'

CURTIS PERRY, GREGGORY CLARK

Learning together: (left) Yosuke Kawasaki takes a selfie with a 2024 Mentorship participant; (below) established NAC players guide Mentorship musicians during a rehearsal

encompasses everything from practical guidance about posture to more refined questions of sound production and blending. 'When the mentees come to us, they're already very good players,' says Donnelly, 'but the one major difference between me and them is the number of years I've been performing with the orchestra. They might come with a lot of nervous energy, and we show them how to manage that stress. Experience counts for a lot.'

It's worth noting, too, that the experience of mentoring young and enthusiastic players can be just as important for the hardened professionals. 'They're full of energy, so excited and open,' says Donnelly, 'and their enthusiasm energises me!' It's a sentiment echoed by NACO concertmaster Yosuke Kawasaki, who has performed with the orchestra since 2008. The ensemble, he observes, is comprised of around 65 players, so welcoming mentees for a three-week period of unbroken rehearsal is the perfect opportunity to perform large-scale repertoire. 'It's really a win-win situation,' he says. 'We want to play larger works, so it's great to know that there are designated weeks when this can happen – and it's giving the mentees such a great experience at the same time. We've invited certain players, who have been a good fit with the orchestra, to return for the scheme the following year, and I hope this can be the start of a deeper relationship. It really feels like an exciting summer festival – just held at home!'

In the spirit of a wider teaching hospital, the Mentorship scheme encompasses more than instrumental training, too. Alongside apprenticeship strands for music librarians and orchestral personnel managers, one of its most exciting components is the provision for budding conductors – two candidates on the verge of professional careers, who join Shelley and the rest of the mentees during the three weeks. This happens alongside a newly launched resident conductor position, and opportunities for assistant conductors throughout the season.

More than any other position in the orchestra, the conductor is the most mysteriously charismatic – relying less on technique than on personality, aura and the ability to convey his or her interpretation of the music in a way that galvanises the ensemble. Is it possible, then, to teach the art of conducting? 'Arms are so important,' counters Shelley. 'As a conductor you can get away with being a great musician and not having a particularly clear baton technique – some of the people I admire deeply fall into that category. But I still think it's important to encourage the mentees to develop a command of their arms. Our conscious brain is very slow, and yet our subconscious has processing powers beyond comprehension. So, the key is to shift those conscious skills to the subconscious – as all musicians must do when practising a piece – but it's a controlled subconscious. We can actually change our instinctive behaviours – in any area – through training and mental control.'

As for the other – arguably more important – aspect of charisma and inspiration, Shelley advises his mentees to avoid trying to be 'liked'. 'If you're honest about your relationship with the score, then it shouldn't be about you,' he says.

With such sage advice, it's little wonder that the Mentorship Program has already chalked up numerous successes – measured in the best way possible, by the number of participants who have gone on to win an orchestral position. 'Every year, someone in the trumpet section has won a job after, or even during, the programme,' says Donnelly. Indeed, two members of the NACO itself are former mentees – winning their roles after a blind audition. And in the end, what better endorsement? 'Winning an orchestral role is like winning an Olympic medal,' says Donnelly seriously. 'The difference between success and failure is probably a thousandth of a per cent, so any small thing that can give you an edge is worthwhile.'

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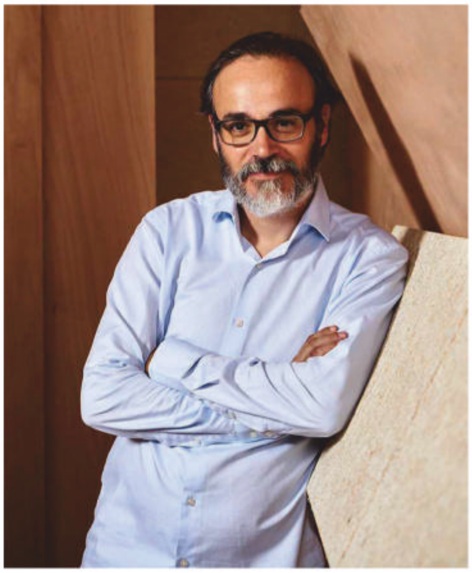
FESTIVAL GUIDE 2025

COMPILED & WRITTEN: PAUL RILEY



Welcome!

What would the warm summer months be without a glorious array of music-making? Thankfully we don't have to find out – all over the world in 2025, festivals large and small have pulled out the stops to present a wealth of creative, collaborative, provocative and polished programming, in everything from Renaissance riches to contemporary classics-in-the-making.

Want charming chamber music in an intimate medieval setting? Look no further than Kent's JAM on the Marsh. Epic opera in a Finnish castle more your thing? Head over to Savonlinna's 550-year-old fortress on the lake. How about picnics and music under the stars? The mountain-wreathed Sun Valley Pavilion in Idaho has you covered. No matter your tastes, fabulous music festival treats await you this summer! **Charlotte Smith** *Editor*

United Kingdom

Multitudes Festival

Southbank Centre, London, 23 April – 3 May

southbankcentre.co.uk

'Reimagining the concert experience' is what London's newest festival is all about, and that reimagining pairs the Southbank Centre's resident ensembles with artists working across all genres. Aurora Orchestra teams up with theatre company Frantic Assembly for the world premiere of Richard Ayres's *Dr Frompou's Anatomical Study of an Orchestra*; London Sinfonietta marks Terry Riley's 90th birthday with a danced performance of *In C*; the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra dives into Grime and Hip-Hop; and Mahler's 'Symphony of 1000' sets the Southbank ablaze.

Tectonics

Glasgow, 3, 4 May

tectonicsfestival.com

'Why Tectonics?' asks conductor Ilan Volkov, curator of a festival that has been dispensing challenge and enlightenment to Glasgow for over a decade now. His answer? 'It's a word that conjures up earthquake, renewal and change.' The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra supplies the bedrock for an edition that features the world premieres of works by Sylvia Lim and Eleanor Cully Boehringer plus UK premieres galore.

Brighton Festival

Brighton, 3-26 May

brightonfestival.org

There's no getting away from the sea at Brighton – and why would anyone want to? Certainly not the festival's guest director, sitarist-composer Anoushka Shankar, who has relished the 'cross-pollinating' possibilities of a vibrant multi-arts programme, threading a South Asian perspective across seven world premieres, 15 commissions and, along the seafront, a Percussion Procession combining specially composed music, temple processions and UK carnivals. Shankar herself revisits *Passages*, her father Ravi's collaboration with Philip

LAURA LEWIS, MATTHEW JOHNSON, JAMES MOLLISON

Across the country: Anoushka Shankar takes the reins in Brighton; (left) Lotte Betts-Dean explores electronics in Norwich; Ilan Volkov spearheads 'renewal and change' in Glasgow

Glass; Les Arts Florissants salute director William Christie at 80; and in a concert that features John Luther Adams's *Vespers of the Blessed Earth*, violinist Francesca Dego gives the UK premiere of Rachel Portman's *Tipping Points*.

Norfolk and Norwich Festival

Norwich, 9-25 May

nnfestival.org.uk

When it comes to festivals, Norwich knows a thing or two, boastsing over 250 years' experience. It says hello to its latest incarnation with an al fresco Welcome Weekend filled with pop-ups but, thanks to its choral origins, classical music has long been at its heart. Guitarist Sean Shibe is in residence, and three recitals span lute music to Birtwistle plus a new work by Sasha Scott. Resident, too, is mezzo Lotte Betts-Dean, who explores electronics in Voice Electric/Endless Joy, and in Octagon chapel sings Messiaen's *Harawi*. In the cathedral, Britten Sinfonia marks the 90th birthday of Arvo Pärt.

Chiltern Arts Festival

Various venues, Chilterns, 9-20 May

chilternarts.com

Handel's *Water Music* wouldn't go amiss at the start of this year's festival, which takes to the Thames with violinist Lizzie Ball and accordionist Miloš Milivojević for a musically globe-trotting river cruise. On dry land, poetry walks accompany two recitals orbiting Bach's Suites for solo cello paired with new music; in Princes Risborough, Ravel's American odyssey is unpicked; the Londinium Consort revisits the Renaissance in Berkhamsted; and Vaughan Williams, Golijov and juggling invade High Wycombe.

Chipping Campden Festival

Chipping Campden, 12-24 May

campdenmayfestivals.co.uk

The festival's prefatory litfest is striking out with a staging of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, but there will be no hanging around as music beckons, and some 20 concerts take up residence in the town's acoustically blessed Church of St James. The Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective bags a mini weekend residency including tenor Allan Clayton singing Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge*; Tenebrae splices Bach and MacMillan; Richard Goode traverses Beethoven's last three piano sonatas; and, in one of three appearances, the Festival Academy

United Kingdom

Birthday boys and girls: Ensemble 360 celebrates its 20th anniversary in Sheffield

MATTHEW JOHNSON/MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Orchestra gives the first performance of Roderick Williams's new Flute Concerto.

Stamford International Music Festival

Stamford Arts Centre, 15-17 May

simfestival.com

There's more than ravishing architecture to savour in Georgian Stamford. For nearly a decade, violinist Freya Goldmark has curated a festival that, from Eastern Europe to French post-impressionism, has earned the word 'International'. Spain clicks a castanet this year, and not without some ingenuity: *Carmen* tries four violins and double bass for size; Scarlatti scintillates; and in St Martin's Church, Haydn's *Seven Last Words* (originally commissioned for Cadiz) invite late-evening contemplation.

Bath Festival

Bath, 16-25 May

bathfestivals.org.uk

Bath just wouldn't be Bath without the omnivorous city-wide showcase that is 'Party in the City'. But as sleeves are rolled up, the Marian Consort explores recusant Byrd beneath the glorious fan vaulting of the Abbey – where Stile Antico later sends 500th-birthday greetings to Palestrina. With its Jane Austen and William Wilberforce associations, St Swithin's Church becomes the festival's unofficial home, with the complete Bach Cello Suites played by Guy Johnston, the Fibonacci and Marmen string quartets and the baroquerie of Ensemble Molière. And in a three-part residency, guitarist Sean Shibe proposes ribaldry in a pizzeria, and Steve Reich in triplicate.

Sheffield Chamber Music Festival

Various venues, Sheffield, 16-24 May

musicintheround.co.uk

Last year, Music in the Round celebrated 40 years of purveying top-drawer chamber music to Sheffield and beyond. 2025's chamberfest recognises the 20th birthday of its lynchpin: the versatile, shape-shifting Ensemble 360. The performers forge new alliances with percussionist Evelyn Glennie and sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun; the premiere of a new work by Aileen Sweeney is bookended by Huw Watkins and Schubert on opening night; Saariaho, Boulez and Nono are leavened with Scottish folk music; and at 5am, JS Bach greets the dawn chorus.

Perth Arts Festival

Perth, 22-31 May

perthfestival.co.uk

It's not quite murder in the cathedral, but rather suicide as Puccini's *Suor Angelica* sips poison in the hallowed surroundings of St Ninian's. Opera Bohemia does the honours for Perth's operatic excursion '25; and at ancient St John's Kirk Suzi Digby directs ORA Singers in a programme pairing settings of the Miserere by Allegri and James MacMillan, as well as a new work by Electra Perivolaris. The Philippine Philharmonic, meanwhile, wraps classical evergreens around a new commission from Jeffrey Ching.

English Music Festival

Dorchester-on-Thames, 23-26 May

englishmusicfestival.org.uk

Although it has presented editions in several English counties and even Johannesburg, Dorchester Abbey is the nerve centre of the English Music Festival's May instalment – which opens with Bliss guaranteed! Accompanied by the BBC Concert Orchestra under Martin Yate, Raphael Wallfisch is the soloist in Sir Arthur's Cello Concerto; and world premieres plus first public performances include works by Howells, Rawsthorne and Symphony No. 2 by Vaughan Williams pupil Stanley Bate.

Swaledale Festival

North Yorkshire, 24 May – 7 June

swalefest.org

The name might imply something singular, but in fact Swaledale Festival intrudes into Wensleydale and Arkengarthdale to secure a triumvirate that ensures a sublime backdrop to a multi-arts line-up with classical music at its heart. Ravel is roundly celebrated by The Royal Northern Sinfonia,

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Ingrid Fliter photo by Gary Houlder

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Pebble clef: Maggi Hambling's sculpture and (right) Leila Josefowicz play their part at Aldeburgh Festival

Carducci Quartet and pianist Pascal Rogé, among others; soprano Ruby Hughes and Fretwork plunge into the Baroque; and Trouvere Medieval Minstrels push back to the 12th century and, in Spennymoor's St Michael's Church, explore the *Ludus Danielis*.

New Music Biennial

Bradford, 6-8 June

bradford2025.co.uk

Bradford is the 2025 UK City of Culture and, stealing a march on London, hosts the New Music Biennial before a repeat at the Southbank Centre in July. An enduring legacy of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, it showcases new works bestriding genres ranging from sound installation and electronica to R&B and Jazz – and ensembles including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Maxwell Quartet, Carice Singers and Sinfonia Cymru. Among the composers are Ellie Wilson, Mark David Boden and Daniel Kidane.

Northern Aldborough Festival

Aldborough, N Yorks, 12-21 June

aldboroughfestival.co.uk

That Aldborough features a singing competition in its three-decades-old festival should come as no surprise: the artistic director is countertenor Robert Ogden and vocal music is never far from the festival's thoughts. This summer, Wild Arts Opera presents Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*; Armonico Consort performs Rachmaninov's *Vespers*; the Thanda Gumede Trio flexes its fusion expertise; and in St Andrew's Church, mezzo Sarah Connolly and pianist Imogen Cooper perform songs by Schumann, Mozart and Duparc.

Aldeburgh Festival

Snape Maltings and around, 13-29 June

brittenpearsarts.org

The festival founded by Britten and Pears isn't just about Aldeburgh. Indeed, enlisting majestic churches such as Orford and Blythburgh, its hub has long been at Snape Maltings. New for 2025 is the 'Big Day Out' on the final Saturday, a 'festival extra' of pop-ups, music and food for those with any energy left after the main programme's 23 world and UK premieres, plus residencies for composers Helen Grime and Daniel Kidane, tenor Allan Clayton and violinist Leila Josefowicz. For early birds, a 4.20am Summer Solstice rendez-vous at Maggi Hambling's sculpture on the beach promises musical and culinary treats.

Lewes Chamber Music Festival

Lewes, 13-15 June

leweschambermusicfestival.com

For opera lovers, Lewes is, perhaps, a staging post en route to Glyndebourne; but every June for the past dozen years, it has boasted a chamber music festival directed by violinist Beatrice Philips. Under the headline 'Notes from a Small Island', the 2025 edition celebrates British composers and their continental influences. Thomas Adès's quintets – one for piano, the other for clarinet – both feature alongside music by Britten, Fauré and Walton; and countertenor Iestyn Davies sings bespoke chamber arrangements of songs by Gerald Finzi.

Stour Music

Boughton Aluph, Kent, 20-29 June

stourmusic.org.uk

Deadly Nightshade is growing in the 'garden of England' as French medieval ensemble Apotropaïk makes its festival debut wreathed in musical Bella Donna. Stour debutantes, too, are German Renaissance wind ensemble Hanse Pfeyfferey, who team up with I Fagiolini to 'Party like it's 1523'. Boughton Aluph's pilgrim church also reverberates to 17th-century supersized surround sound and is on the side of the Angels in the company of Solomon's Knot. Plus, under artistic director Robert Hollingworth, the festival takes its leave with more Bach(s), Mendelssohn and SS Wesley.

Thaxted Festival

Thaxted 20 June – 13 July

thaxtedfestival.co.uk

Gustav Holst would surely have approved of the Morris dancing that greets the conclusion of a recital by the Doric String Quartet! The pioneer of a Thaxted festival in 1916, he was deeply rooted in folk traditions. Thaxted '25 has a song in its heart, as Nicky Spence explores the father-son dynamic, while fellow tenor Neil Balfour is on a love quest that culminates in Schumann's *Frauen-Liebe und Leben*. And thwarted love is in the air for Wild Arts' new production of Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*. Jaeden Izik-Dzurko, winner of last

GETTY, TOM ZIMBEROFF

United Kingdom

Dusky appeal: the Church of St Thomas Becket on Romney Marsh; (below) Evelyn Glennie performs at St Jude's Prom

year's Leeds Piano Competition, plays Bach, Chopin and Rachmaninov.

St Magnus Festival

Orkney, 20-27 June

stmagnusfestival.com

Day and night inhabit a liminal space in an Orcadian June, a space that lends a particular ambience to a festival forever indebted to its founding fathers, composer Peter Maxwell Davies and poet George Mackay Brown. Vocal ensemble Echo is in residence and weaves together Britten, James MacMillan and Judith Weir. A wind quintet-accompanied Dvořák's Mass in D colonises St Magnus Cathedral; and among Orkney's other enticements are the Resol String Quartet, a focus on the accordion and Katherine Wren's ensemble Nordic Viola.

Proms at St Jude's

Hampstead Garden Suburb, London, 21-29 June

promsatstjudes.org.uk

Petroc Trelawny is no stranger to presenting the BBC Proms, but this year he first forsakes South Kensington for Hampstead Garden Suburb to introduce his new book on Cornwall as part of NW11's Proms-cum-Litfest. The musical cohort includes the Fibonacci Quartet, percussionist Evelyn Glennie, The Swingles and a last-night Italian Carnevale. But overlaps are not excluded! Abetted by actors Anton Lesser and Charlie Hamblett, The Orchestra of the Swan evokes the world of Laurie Lee.

East Neuk Festival

Fife, 25-29 June

eastneukfestival.com

East Neuk's programming has always been a connoisseur's delight, and this year's 20th edition invites the seaside villages of the Fife coast to a particularly classy celebration. The Beethoven late quartets are shared between the Belcea, Castalian, Elias and Pavel Haas quartets – who combine for a new piece by Sally Beamish. Schubert song cycles enlist tenor Mark Padmore and baritone James Newby, while guitarist Sean Shibe is in Anstruther for his third recital, where Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* awaits.

Manchester International Festival

Manchester, 3-20 July

factoryinternational.org

Biennial Manchester launched back in 2007 and signalled ambitions to present only the new and challenging with its inaugural collaboration between Damon Albarn and Chen Shi-Zheng. Among this year's crop of cutting-edgers are the Royal Ballet, Shilpa Gupta and Eric Cantona, while at the Royal Northern College of Music, 'A Possibility' – Germaine Kruip's part-sculptural installation, part-soundscape – draws on new music for percussion from Emily Howard and Hahn Rowe.

JAM on the Marsh Festival

Romney Marsh, Kent, 3-13 July

jamconcert.org

The haunting landscape of Romney Marsh and its medieval churches have been home to JAM's summer festival for over a decade, and this year Paul Mealor receives 50th-birthday greetings across three concerts spotlighting his music. Premieres of works by Steve Richer and Marisse Cato rub shoulders with the BBC Singers, London Tango Quintet, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the voracious Kosmos Ensemble.

Deal, Festival

Deal, Kent, 3-13 July

dealmusicandarts.com

A reliable set of sea legs wouldn't go amiss as Deal looks to its littoral and beyond for 2025's marine theme. In Dover's newly restored Maison Dieu, artistic director Luke Styles's *Coastlines – An Oratorio of Gulls* salutes the herring gull; soprano Lucy Crowe and the Fantasia Orchestra perform an evening of music inspired by birdsong; and Anna Braithwaite's sound installation 'Pilgrimage' charts a walk on the coast path from Deal to Dover, including field recordings and improvised vocal music.

York Early Music Festival

York, 4-11 July

ncem.co.uk

Beverley's early music Mayfest done and dusted, it's York's turn, with 'Heaven and Hell' on its sobering agenda. Four hundred years after his death, Orlando Gibbons is remembered by both Fretwork and the Rose Consort of Viols, and there are vivacious *villancicos* from Spanish ensemble Cantoria, plus a celebration of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*

▶

GETTY

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THE ROSSINI FESTIVAL IN PESARO

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Held every summer in Pesaro, where the composer was born in 1792, the Rossini Festival has always attracted the world's greatest bel canto singers. Marilyn Horne, Montserrat Caballe, June Anderson, Rockwell Blake, Chris Merrit and Juan Diego Florez are just a few of those who have sung in Rossini's hometown. When the Festival began, all performances took place at the 800 seat Teatro Rossini, but as its reputation has grown, performances are also given in some larger spaces – such is the demand from a worldwide audience. This year we will see performances of *Zelmira*, *L'Italiana in Algeri* and *Il Viaggio a Reims*.

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THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL IN MADEIRA

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The subtropical island of Madeira is the setting for our new Festival, which combines winter sunshine with private concerts and exotic gardens. Staying at one of Europe's most famous grand hotels, Belmond's elegant and historic Reid's Palace, we will enjoy performances from the Kleio Quartet, violist Simon Rowland-Jones, pianist Jâms Coleman, and Levi Andreassen on double bass. We will also explore this diverse island's astonishing range of plants, trees and shrubs which cover the dramatic volcanic landscape, visiting traditional villages, enjoying spectacular sea and mountain views and, of course, sampling Madeira's famous wines.

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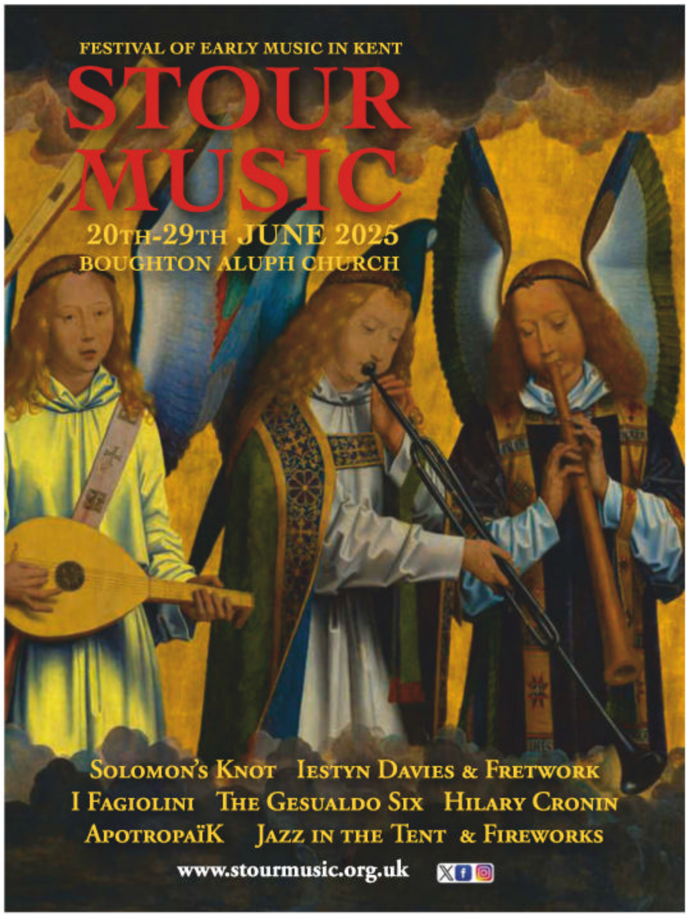

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– published exactly three centuries ago. Medieval specialists Sollazzo join Landini, Tapissier and others in siding with the angels, while Ensemble Bastion braves 17th-century heaven and hell.

Cheltenham Festival

Cheltenham, 4-12 July

cheltenhamfestivals.com

Eighty years ago, a young Benjamin Britten premiered the *Four Sea Interludes* from his latest work, the opera *Peter Grimes*: the first Cheltenham Festival was under way. Eight decades on, performed by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the *Interludes* return as part of a celebration that remembers festivals past and looks to the future with commissions from Deborah Pritchard and Anna Semple. Berlioz's ear-filling Te Deum is dispatched to nearby Gloucester Cathedral; the Vision Quartet plays Ravel and Dvořák from memory; and the Gesualdo Six are on the trail of Orlando Gibbons.

Ryedale Festival

North Yorkshire, 11-27 July

ryedalefestival.com

With some 60 concerts spread over more than 30 venues – stately, ecclesiastical and otherwise – little wonder Ryedale Festival has a phalanx of artists-in-residence almost as capacious as Yorkshire itself. Among them are soprano Claire Booth, Quatuor Mosaïques and Voces8. Overlooked Tippett is revived, early music transports Arcangelo to Selby Abbey, while in Ripon Cathedral the Orchestra of Opera North unveils a new arrangement of the Viola Sonata by Arthur Bliss.

Lichfield Festival

Lichfield, 8-20 July

lichfeldfestival.org

It's not just the cathedral's triple spires that are inspiring! Lichfield is a city that, from spring litfest to autumn chamber music, sets great store by its festivals. They bookend summer's flagship jamboree, which isn't afraid to tread on sibling toes. The BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Ryan Bancroft heads up this year's offering that indulges a 'Baroque meet Bridgerton' sketch of 18th-century soprano Kitty Clive, pulls on its pilgrim boots for Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles* and revels in Ravel.

High achievers: Sacconi Quartet performs Ravel in Buxton; (below) Ryan Bancroft conducts BBC NOW in Lichfield

VENETIA VAN HOORN ALKEMA, BEN EALOVEGA

Buxton Festival

Buxton, 10-27 July

buxtonfestival.co.uk

Over its near-half-century existence, Buxton has not been afraid to take the operatic path less travelled. This year, it has commissioned a quadruple bill of 20-minute opera shorts from composers including Thanda Gumede and Jasper Dommett. They sit astride a series launched by Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*, followed by Charpentier's *Orphée* as well as Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, Poulenc's *La voix humaine* and Mozart's *The Impresario*. Among concert highlights, anniversary felicitations are bestowed on Palestrina 500 (The Tallis Scholars), Ravel 150 (Sacconi Quartet) and Oscar Peterson 100 (pianist Dean Stockdale).

BBC Proms

London, 18 July –13 September

bbc.co.uk/proms

After last year's record-breaking edition, the BBC Proms has a spring in its step – and all to play for! Anniversaries were honoured, world premieres delivered, and UK venues added to its South Kensington heartland. Details for 2025 are currently under wraps and will be announced on 24 April. Check the website for information.

Music at Paxton

Berwick-on-Tweed, 18-27 July

musicatpaxton.co.uk

'Princess Edmond de Polignac Requests the Pleasure of Your Company'. She may not be in the familiar surroundings of her Paris salon, but the Princess certainly wouldn't feel out of place in Palladian Paxton's imposing Picture Gallery. Facilitating her 'request' is the Chloé Piano Trio – and tantalising gossip is assured. The Consone Quartet ends its three-year residency with concerts including the Scottish premiere of Oliver Leith's Chaconne; and, as well as pianists Yevgeny Sudbin and Pavel Kolesnikov, Paxton '25 promises Traditional Tunes for Tiny People, and even a dash of Bollywood-meets Bhangra.

Fishguard Festival of Music

Pembrokeshire, 18-31 July

fishguardmusicfestival.com

Seaside Fishguard styles itself the gateway to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, and against the backdrop of a ravishing seascape and the Preseli Hills it has enjoyed an invigorating music festival for over half a century.

United Kingdom

Hay major: Novo Quartet perform at Lake District Summer Music

RITA KUHLMANN

Orchestral concerts in the cathedral at St David's – the first by the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera under Tomáš Hanus – bookend this year's instalment. Meanwhile, in Teifi Valley Rhosygilwen ahead of their trio recital, the Kosmos Ensemble joins the WNO Chamber Orchestra for Errollyn Wallen's Triple Concerto for violin, viola, and accordion.

Three Choirs Festival

Hereford, 26 July – 2 August

3choirs.org

There have been rotating choral meetings of minds at the Cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester for over three centuries, and the 2025 assembly falls to Hereford, where the 150th anniversary of the birth of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor spurs a revival of his oratorio *Atonement* (premiered at Hereford in 1903). Herbert Howells's *Hymnus Paradisi* also features, 75 years since its first performance, in a line-up buttressed by the resident Philharmonia Orchestra and including a new work by Michael Finnissy.

Lake District Summer Music

Cumbria, 1-10 August

ldsm.org.uk

The 40th-anniversary LDSM is cutting Beethoven down to size. All five piano concertos are performed by Paul Lewis across the festival, but the first four are in chamber versions courtesy of the Vertavo String Quartet. The 'Emperor', however, refuses new clothes and, obliged by the Northern Chamber Orchestra, is paired with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Vocal ensemble Kantos interrogates the elements; the Vertavos are joined by the Barbican and Novo quartets; while on opening night, saxophonist Jess Gillam and her ensemble blow up a storm.

Edinburgh International Festival

Edinburgh, 1-24 August

eif.co.uk

The title of James Graham's new play which opens Edinburgh '25 could surely serve as the festival's motto. In the event, 'Make it Happen' yields to artistic director Nicola Benedetti's overarching theme 'The Truth We Seek'. Truth-seekers include orchestras from Beijing, Warsaw and Budapest, together with an LSO residency and a radical Australian reimagining of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice.* The Festival Chorus turns 60 and shoulders the seven-hour marathon of Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple*, Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* and Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. In the Queen's Hall, chamber music proliferates, framed by the King's Singers with percussionist Colin Currie, and, with their minds set on JS Bach, the Apollon Ensemble perform alongside violinist Leonidas Kavakos.

Clandeboye Festival

Bangor, County Down, 16-23 August

camerata-ireland.com

Anchored by its young musicians' Academy, Camerata Ireland and pianist Barry Douglas, the festival is a County Down fixture that next year notches up a quarter century of music-making on the aristocratic Clandeboye Estate. This year's working title is 'Aspect of the Mediterranean', and a focus on France and Spain ranges across 13 concerts, masterclasses and the Young Musicians' Showcase.

Presteigne Festival

Presteigne, 21-25 August

presteignefestival.com

Prefaced by a recently inaugurated 'May Springboard Weekend', Presteigne commemorates the 50th anniversary of the death of Shostakovich. But it has never been a festival to dwell in the past. Thirteen commissions look to Helen Grime, Huw Watkins and composer-in-residence Eleanor Alberga, among others. And music by a further dozen-or-so living composers – including Thomas Adès, Judith Weir and Steve Reich – weaves around the likes of Bach, Britten and Mahler. With opera and orchestral music in the mix, Presteigne punches consistently above its weight.

Lammermuir Festival

East Lothian, 4-15 September

lammermuirfestival.co.uk

What is it about Scotland and festivals? The perfect marriage of repertoire and artists best equipped to bring something special to the interpretative table seems almost infallibly instinctive. East Lothian's Lammermuir certainly pulls off the feat with disarming ease. Monteverdi directed by Rinaldo Alessandrini, Ravel and Brahms at the heart of chamber music from the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, the Dudok, Carducci and Maxwell string quartets, and artist-in-residence cellist Laura van der Heijden enliven autumn in Sir Walter Scott country along with the numerically bigger guns of Scottish Opera and the Philharmonia Orchestra.

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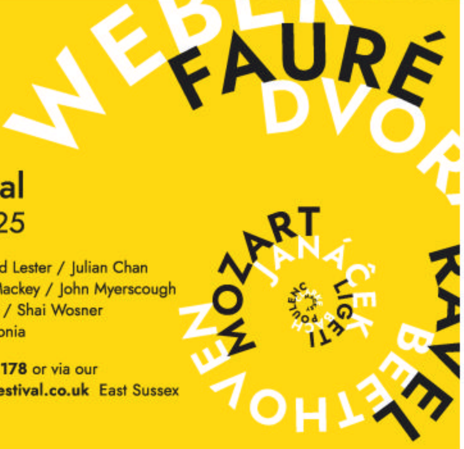

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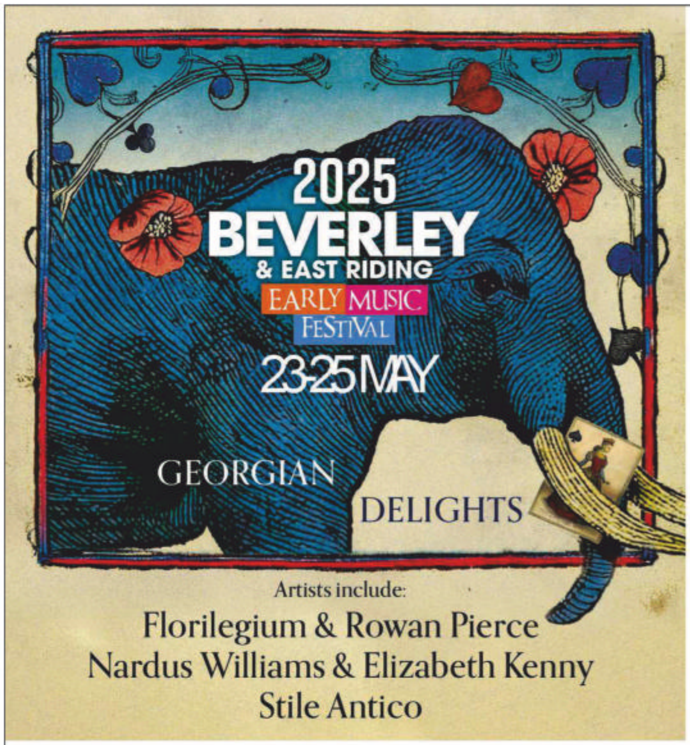
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UK Summer Opera

A country grail: Glyndebourne stages Wagner's *Parsifal*, conducted by Robin Ticciati (left)

Glyndebourne

Lewes, Sussex, 16 May – 24 August

glyndebourne.com

For long the holy grail among seasoned afficionados of English country house opera, Glyndebourne unveils a grail of its own this season. From *Meistersinger* to *Tristan und Isolde* Wagner is no stranger to Glyndebourne, but, conducted by Robin Ticciati, *Parsifal* is staged here for the first time. The production enlists Dutch director Jetske Mijnssen and features Daniel Johansson in the title role. Wedding bells, meanwhile, summon the other new production, as an eventful 'day in the life' of the Almaviva household unites director Mariame Clément and conductor Riccardo Minasi in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* – the opera that inaugurated the festival 91 years ago.

Revivals include Damiano Michieletto's searing staging of Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová*, Handel's *Saul* – deploying the period instruments of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under Jonathan Cohen – and, bringing down the final curtain, Verdi's larger-than-life operatic swansong, *Falstaff*. Not quite the final curtain, however, as Autumn promises 'Bohemian' Puccini, 'Midsummer' Britten and the premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's new opera *The Railway Children*. Just the ticket!

Opera Holland Park

London, 27 May – 2 August

operahollandpark.com

Nestling in the bustling heart of London W8, Opera Holland Park has carved out a reputation for championing the byways of Italian *verismo*. This summer, though, Verdi's *La traviata* and a new production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* showcase more familiar fare. That familiarity is tempered by intriguing interlopers. The English premiere of a topical satire by Emma Jenkins and Toby Hession is coupled with Gilbert & Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*; and, two years after its OHP world premiere, Jonathan Dove's *Itch* is scratched once more. To launch the season, Peter Selwyn conducts a new production by Julia Burbach of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*.

Garsington Opera

Wormsley Estate, Buckinghamshire, 28 May – 22 July

garsingtonopera.org

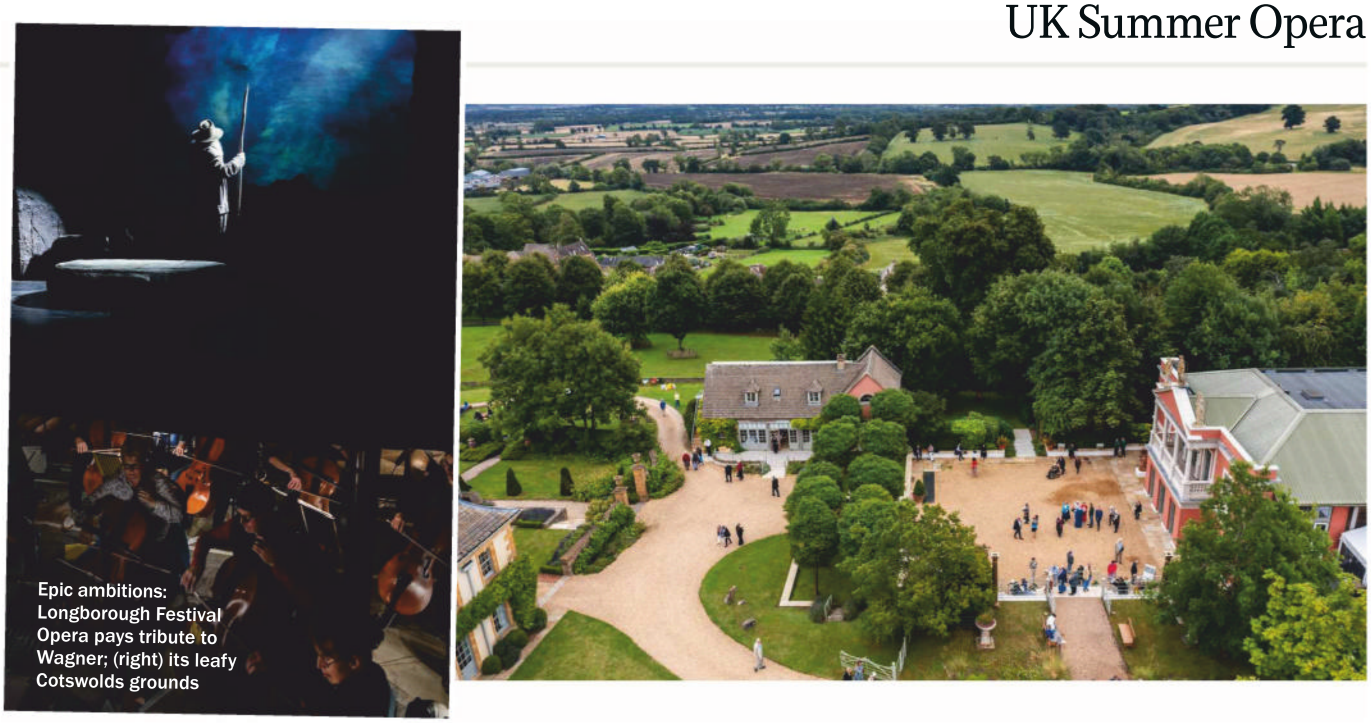
Fresh from a lauded BBC Proms debut last year, Garsington swaps the Royal Albert Hall for the more intimate surroundings of its airy pavilion home in bucolic Buckinghamshire. The amorous genie is let out of the bottle with Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and, one way or another, love is in the air throughout the season – be it the all-conquering heroic variety of Beethoven's *Fidelio* or the tangled intrigues driving Handel's *Rodelinda*. They're both accompanied by the period forces of The English Concert, the latter conducted by Peter Whelan. The romantic leader of the pack, however, falls to Tchaikovsky's turbulent take on Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, which is conducted by Garsington's artistic director Douglas Boyd.

Longborough Festival Opera

Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, 26 May – 2 August

lfo.org.uk

Mélisande isn't the only one letting her hair down this summer. Conductor Anthony Negus follows last year's three complete *Ring* cycles with Debussy's



Epic ambitions: Longborough Festival Opera pays tribute to Wagner; (right) its leafy Cotswolds grounds

Maeterlinck-inspired masterpiece *Pelléas et Mélisande* – a crepuscular foil to Rossini's scintillating *Barber of Seville* which entices director Louise Bakker and conductor Elaine Kelly to leafy Longborough. Also Longborough-bound are the inimitable period-instrument co-op Barokksolistene, who underpin a new production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. But Wagner isn't entirely exiled. By way of a season opener, Polly Graham directs the UK premiere of Avner Dorman's 2017 tale of legacy and familial infighting, *Wahnfried: the birth of the Wagner cult.*

The Grange Festival

Alresford, Hampshire, 4 June – 6 July

thegrangefestival.co.uk

Garsington might boast Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, but for two nights in the company of the BBC Concert Orchestra, Queen and Freddie Mercury are celebrated at The Grange – one of four concert diversions from an operatic programme that promises Verdi's *La traviata* (conducted by Richard Farnes), and Johann Strauss II's evergreen *Die Fledermaus*. Hip-hop and Hampshire converge for the other operatic offering: director-choreographer Bintou Dembélé and the dancers of La Structure Rualité team up with Cappella Mediterranea and Namur Chamber Choir for a bold re-imagining of Rameau's already-exotic *Les Indes Galantes.*

MATTHEW WILLIAMS-ELLIS, GETTY, BEN EALOVEGA

Grange Park Opera

West Horsley Place, Surrey, 5 June – 13 July

grangeparkopera.co.uk

The world premiere of Nishat Khan's 'sitar opera' *Taj Mahal* lends a touch of eastern promise to Grange Park's handsome theatre-in-the-woods. And, directed by David Pountney, there's a rare chance to encounter Tchaikovsky's full-blooded *Mazeppa* on stage. But Italy bags the lion's share of a Surrey summer as a revival of Pountney's production of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* is headed up by Simon Keenlyside; and Hye-Youn Lee takes the title role in Puccini's damning indictment of imperialism, *Madam Butterfly.*

Bampton Classical Opera

Bampton, Oxfordshire, 18 July – 6 September

bamptonopera.org

When it comes to Antonio Salieri, Bampton has form. With four of his operas already under its belt, how could the company resist another in this year marking the 200th anniversary of the Italian composer's death? Sung in a new English translation, *La locandiera* (The Landlady), is a Goldoni-derived comedy of manners that drew a critical thumbs-up at its 1773 Vienna premiere. Starring soprano Siân Dicker, Jeremy Gray's new production salutes Salieri in three counties, with a London performance to be announced.

Dorset Opera Festival

Bryanston, Dorset, 22-26 July

dorsetopera.com

Having notched up its half century last year, the summer school-cum-opera festival is celebrating its 20th season at Bryanston with an Italian clean sweep. Headlining is Verdi's *Rigoletto,* and a special double bill pairs Puccini's *Suor Angelica* with Mascagni's slice of troubled village life, *Cavalleria rusticana.*

IF Opera

Church Farm, Wingfield, 7-17 August

ifopera.com

IF is on the move, and this year pitches its saddlespan auditorium in the shadow of the Westbury White Horse. *Rigoletto* is leavened with Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*; and, as well as the time-honoured Picnic Prom, a Baroque twosome brings together Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, and Carissimi's 1649 oratorio *Historia Jonae*.

Waterperry Opera

Waterperry House, Oxon, 8-18 August

waterperryoperafestival.co.uk

Winnie-the-Pooh's songbook enlivens the Waterperry amphitheatre; in the ballroom, a musical exploration of Anne Frank's diary confides; and Mozart's Gran Partita serenades al fresco. They're wrapped around Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, plus, conducted by the Festival's music director Bertie Baigent, *Semele*, Handel's hybrid nod to the Roman poet Ovid.

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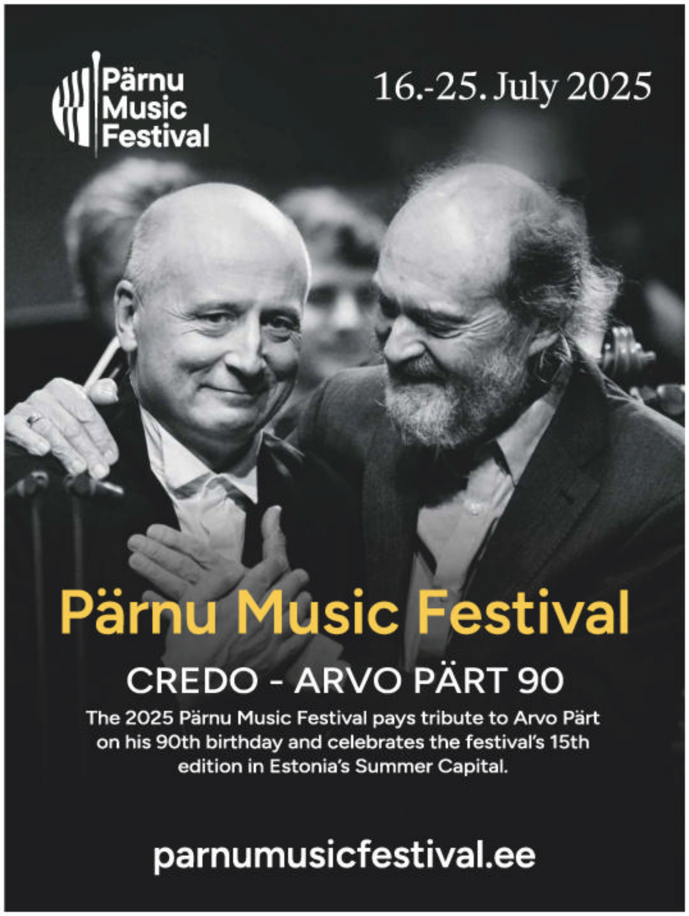

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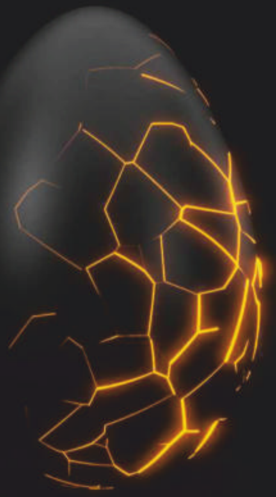

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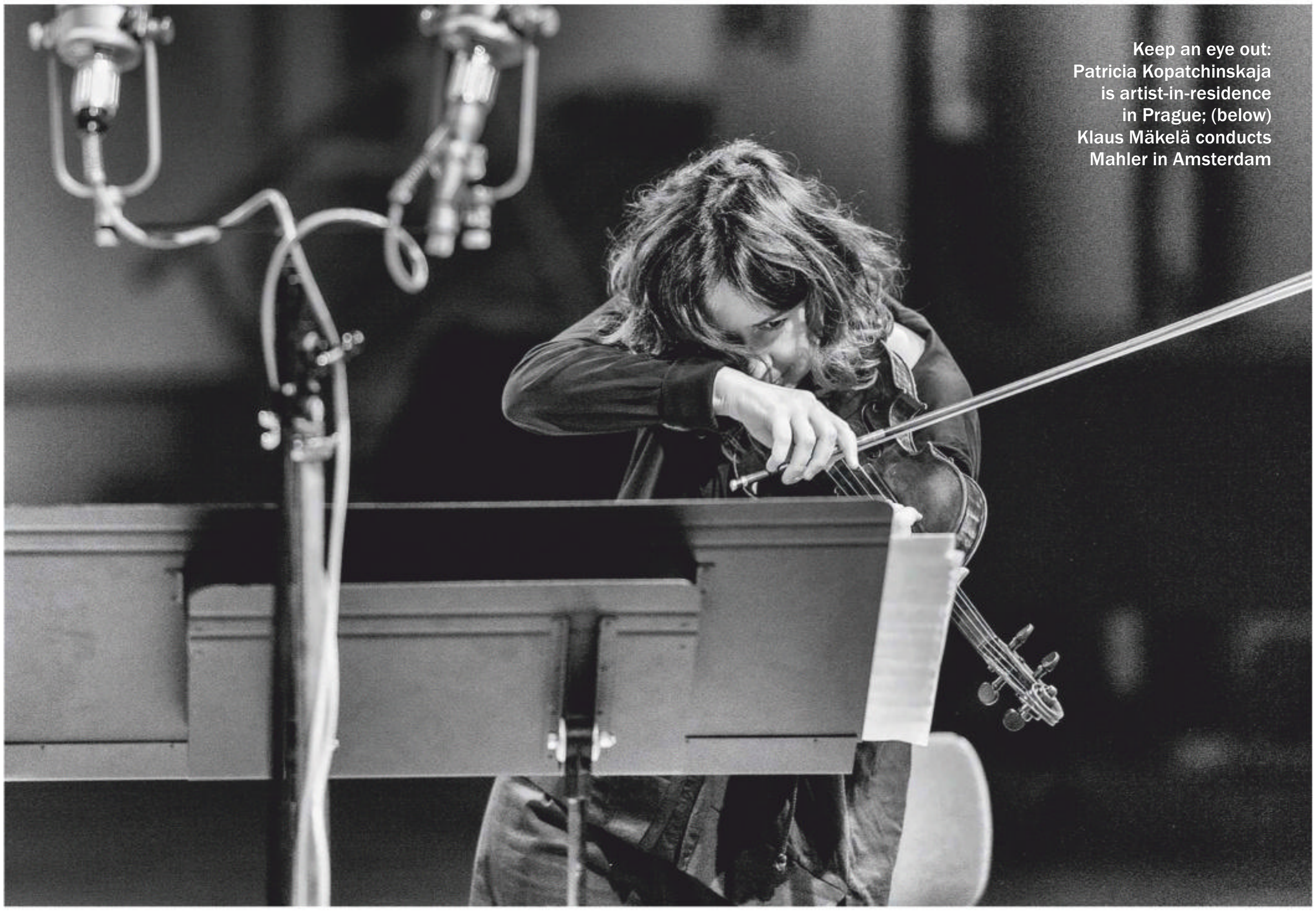

Keep an eye out: Patricia Kopatchinskaja is artist-in-residence in Prague; (below) Klaus Mäkelä conducts Mahler in Amsterdam

Mahler Festival

Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9-18 May

mahlerfestival.concertgebouw.nl/en/

Gustav Mahler first conducted the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1903, and the city subsequently took him to its heart – not least thanks to the enthusiasm of Willem Mengelberg. In 1920, marking 25 years as the orchestra's conductor, Mengelberg organised a Mahler festival, and this third incarnation promises the complete symphonies (performed chronologically) and songs. The Amsterdamers shoulder Symphonies Nos 1 and 8 under Klaus Mäkelä; but the symphonic heavy lifting is shared with flagship orchestras from Budapest, Tokyo, Berlin and Chicago.

Prague Spring Festival

Prague, Czechia, 12 May – 3 June

festival.cz/en

2024 might officially have been the 'Year of Czech Music', but Prague needed little prompting to join in the celebrations. Every year, its Spring Festival opens with Smetana's love letter to his homeland: the tone poem cycle *Ma Vlást* (see p.102). The Czech Philharmonic under Semyon Bychkov do the honours this spring and reconvene to close a bumper 80th-anniversary edition with Mahler's 'Symphony of a Thousand'. Orchestras from Chicago, Boston, Tokyo, London and Vienna join in the rejoicing; and artist-in-residence Patricia Kopatchinskaja champions Czech composer Luboš Fišer. The contemporary music showcase 'Prague Offspring' presents George Benjamin's *Into the Little Hill*, while the early music strand rewinds to the 14th century and Francesco Landini. Add in a production of Janáček's *Jenůfa* by director Calixto Bieito, Arvo Pärt at 90, plus Mozart from Concentus Musicus Wien, and Prague is a festival worth Czeching out!

Dresden Festival

Dresden, Germany, 17 May – 14 June

musikfestspiele.com

From Fado and the traditional Chinese music of Xi'an Orchestra to period-instrument Wagner and open-air Ronan Keating, Dresden is embracing the theme of 'LOVE'. Boldly so, exactly eight decades after the city was reduced to rubble at the end of World War II. It also marks 20 years since the painstakingly

On the blue Bosphorus: Hélène Grimaud takes to the stage in Istanbul

reconstructed Frauenkirche opened its doors once more. Orchestral Górecki and Deep Purple's Jon Lord make for unexpected bedfellows; Mitsuko Uchida pairs Schubert's piano sonata swansong with Kurtág; and, with motets to the fore, Bach's 340th birthday isn't forgotten.

Bergen International Festival

Bergen, Norway, 21 May – 4 June

fib.no

The multi-disciplinary William Kentridge is Bergen's 2025 artist-in-residence, and he nails his cross-genre colours to the mast on the festival's opening night, which partners *The Great Yes, The Great No* with his film accompaniment to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10 performed live by the Bergen Philharmonic. Mezzo Joyce DiDonato ponders the eternal feminine; in the Håkonshallen, Grieg, Sibelius and Franck preoccupy cellist Truls Mørk and pianist Håvard Gimse; and Grieg's Troldhaugen villa welcomes an adroitly plotted chamber music series.

Blackwater Opera Festival

Lismore, Ireland, 27 May – 2 June

blackwatervalleyoperafestival.com

There's midsummer night's dreaming afoot in the Blackwater Valley as the opera festival notches up its 15th anniversary in the company of Britten's bewitched and bewitching brush with the Bard. And could the venue for Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* be more appropriate? The Carthaginian queen's fate is sealed in St Carthage's Cathedral. From free, al fresco lunchtime recitals to an Irish Heritage recital and celebration of George Bernard Shaw, Irish eyes are smiling!

Ravenna Festival

Ravenna, Italy, 31 May – 13 July

ravennafestival.org

The last resting place of Dante, Ravenna isn't shy about looking to literature for an over-arching theme. Two years ago, the centenary of Calvino's birth came in for scrutiny; this year, taking its starting point from Sancho Panza, the city delves into 'Where there is Music there can be nothing bad'. Cue an exploration of courage extending to Handel's *Orlando* during November's operatic postscript. Conductor Zubin Mehta masterminds Strauss's autobiographical *Symphonia domestica*; Mahlerian flowers bloom for the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under Daniel Harding; and The Tallis Scholars pay homage to the anniversaries of Palestrina and Pärt.

Istanbul Music Festival

Istanbul, Turkey, 11-26 June

muzik.iksv.org

'We present artists with an opportunity to dream,' observes festival director Yesim Gürer Oymak. Audiences, too, she might add. This year Istanbul is looking 'Beyond Borders' – cultural, metaphysical and geographic. Chopin Funk meets Whiplash courtesy of The Preda Brothers; world premieres include a specially commissioned piano trio from Valentin Silvestrov; and La Venexiana takes a musical delve into the paintings of Caravaggio with works by Monteverdi, Schütz and Sigismondo d'India. Bosphorus-bound, too, are the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester and Camerata Salzburg with pianist Hélène Grimaud.

Holland Festival

Amsterdam, Netherlands, 11- 29 June

hollandfestival.nl

Holland Festival likes to style itself 'ground-breaking'. And with reason. Among a clutch of world premieres, the Atlas Orchestra's unique sound palette, drawing together instrumental families from Europe and China to Korea and Azerbaijan, is at the service of a new piece by Joël Bons; while Misato Mochizuki's *Otemba – Daring Women* brings a 17th-century Dutch painting to life while addressing issues surrounding colonialism and feminism.

Bachfest Leipzig

Leipzig, Germany, 12-22 June

bachfestleipzig.de

275 years after his death, JS Bach and Leipzig remain in symbiotic cahoots – especially in June when a festival celebrating Bachiana in all its ear-bending variety holds sway. 'Transformations' is the 2025 banner, and it doesn't just encompass Bach's habit of artful recycling, The famous Haussmann portrait itself is recycled thanks to the wonders of augmented reality, allowing the Thomaskantor to step out of its frame for a little chat and music-making. Less futuristic highlights include the B minor Mass two ways, pianist András Schiff, and Nevermind's reimagining of the *Goldberg Variations*.

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Taking flight: Pierre-Laurent Aimard performs *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* in Granada; (left) Diana Damrau gives a song recital in Munich

MRCO BORGGREVE, JIYANG CHEN

Granada Festival

Granada, Spain, 13 June – 19 July

granadafestival.org

The spirits of Falla and Lorca stalk the Andalucian capital and its festival which every summer enlivens the Moorish Alhambra and Generalife Gardens. It's 100 years since Falla's *El amor brujo* and *Psyché* were premiered, and their anniversaries are saluted alongside those of Ravel, Boulez and Berio. The Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia delivers the Verdi Requiem; there's Mahler from the Budapest Festival Orchestra; tenor Ian Bostridge sings Britten; and Messiaen's complete *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* takes flight under Pierre-Laurent Aimard's airborne fingers.

Festival O/Modernt

Stockholm, Sweden, 13-15 June

omodernt.com

Stockholm's dapper Queen Silvia Concert Hall describes itself as 'a sounding room for an interconnected world' and has spent the year navigating a theme based on the idea of bridges. Crowning it is O/Modernt's June festival, which extends the notion to explore 'Crossings'. As ever, the programming is eclectic: Rameau and Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* sit cheek by jowl with Sting, Radiohead and newly commissioned works by Sauli Zinovjev and Nicola Campogrande.

Festival Ljubljana

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 20 June – 12 September

ljubljanafestival.si

Ljubljana lets its hair down with a symphony-orchestra-meets-big-band opening night – soon to be followed by an evening of Flamenco and Latin grooves, not to mention a celebration of Ennio Morricone. But Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Verdi's *Otello* keep the operatic flag flying and, among the attendant orchestral 'big-hitters', the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia partners mezzo Magdalena Kožená, The Monte Carlo Philharmonic acknowledges the Ravel anniversary with pianist Martha Argerich, and, under Franz Welser-Möst, the Vienna Philharmonic unites Mozart and Tchaikovsky.

Rencontres Musicales d'Évian

Évian, France, 25 June – 5 July

hotel-royal.evianresort.com

For violinist Renaud Capuçon, the role of the artistic director is to 'make dreams', and this year his Haute-Savoie festival is dreaming of Ravel. As well as the complete chamber music, *Boléro* is danced by Béjart Ballet Lausanne, and Martha Argerich plays the G major Piano Concerto in an all-Ravel programme from Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse. A Handelian detour involves Les Arts Florissants in *Il Trionfo del Tempo e il Disinganno*, while pianist Igor Levit succumbs to late Schubert.

Munich Opera Festival

Munich, Germany, 27 June – 31 July

staatsoper.de

There's been an opera festival in Munich since 1875, and 150 years on it remains in a league of its own. Opera might be ubiquitous, but not exclusively so. Alongside chamber music concerts and song recitals by the likes of Diana Damrau, Christian Gerhaher and Jonas Kaufmann, Baroque evenings and dance are stitched into a programme probing the allure of myths. Conducted by Susanna Mälkki, Fauré's *Pénélope* secures its Munich premiere, and David Hermann directs a new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Wagner and Strauss bolster the mythic deep dive, as does an eye-catching double bill of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Schoenberg's *Erwartung*.

West Cork Chamber Music Festival

Bantry, Ireland, 27 June – 6 July

westcorkmusic.ie

With year-round concerts, a literary festival and August's focus on traditional music, West Cork Music doesn't let the ▶

grass grow under its feet. Celebrating its 30th edition, the chamber music festival has a soft spot for the family – whether it's composer Brett Dean and his mezzo daughter Lotte, or the brothers and sisters of Quatuor Tchalik who premiere a new work by Sam Perkin on the first night. A sizeable cohort of string quartets includes the returning Chiaroscuros and Dorics; birthday greetings are bestowed on Ravel; and Woodpeckers Recorder Quartet gilds the Baroque with Scandi folk tunes.

Aix-en-Provence Festival

Aix-en-Provence, France, 4-21 July

festival-aix.com

Though by no means exclusively an opera festival, the operatic stage is still at the heart of Aix's blue-chip festival, whether in world premieres or thought-provoking productions. 'Metamorphosis' is central to this year's offerings, which include, staged by director Peter Sellars, the first performance of Sivan Eldar's *The Nine Jewelled Deer*; a radical respray of Britten's *Billy Budd*; and Cavalli's *La Calisto*. In the concert hall, Simon Rattle leads his Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Ligeti, Wagner and Bruckner, while Quatuor Diotima brings together Boulez, Saariaho and Debussy.

Savonlinna Opera Festival

Savonlinna, Finland, 3 July – 2 August

operafestival.fi

Lakeside Olavinlinna celebrates the castle's 550th birthday, and the opera festival that calls it 'home' blows out the candles with a new work by Antti Auvinen as well as Aulis Sallinen's *Linna vedessä* ('The Castle in the Water'). Homage delivered, it's back to operatic business, which marks the half-centenary of Kokkonen's *The Last Temptations*, features Ewa Płonka as the proud Princess in Puccini's *Turandot* and, enlisting the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra, parties like it's 1692 to the beat of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*.

Dubrovnik Summer Festival

Dubrovnik, Croatia, 10 July – 25 August

dubrovnik-festival.hr

The idyllic island of Lokrum becomes Prospero's enchanted isle as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* casts its spell over a Croatian summer – aided and abetted by Goldoni and Chekhov.

GETTY, KYRRE KRISTOFFERSEN, EVA VERMANDEL

Making waves: Bregenz Festival's floating stage on Lake Constance; (top left) Ewa Płonka takes on Turandot in Savonlinna; pianist Pavel Kolesnikov performs in Marvão

But, from homegrown orchestras to Fabio Biondi with the Croatian Baroque Ensemble, Dubrovnik's musical strand sparkles. In the Atrium of the Rector's Palace, Christina Pluhar's L'Arpeggiata salutes 'Wonder Women'; The King's Singers juxtapose 'Angels and Demons'; and, conjoining members of the Philharmonics of Berlin and Vienna, Philharmonix makes its Dubrovnik debut.

Bregenz Festival

Bregenz, Austria, 16 July – 17 August

bregenzerfestspiele.com

Bregenzer Festspiele doesn't just nuzzle up to Lake Constance – its floating opera stage takes to the water, literally! Hannu Lintu conducts Andreas Kriegenburg's new production of Ensecu's *Œdipe* which shares the pontoon-writ-large with Weber's *Der Freischütz*, while in Theater am Kornmarkt, Rossini's *La Cenerentola* battles domestic drudgery. Orchestral and chamber music interweave the operatic fare; Tango by the Lake entices; and the world premiere of Osmo Tapio Räihälä's *Farmer George* is neatly complemented by Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*.

Verbier Festival

Verbier, Switzerland, 16 July – 3 August

verbierfestival.com

From choice chamber music through opera to orchestral masterworks, nothing oxygenates the mountain air of the Swiss Alps quite like Verbier's crucible of learning, performance and discovery – a place where the musical great and good of today nurture the aspiring great and good of tomorrow. Swiss national pride acknowledged on opening night, the star-studded programme unfolds across

some 100 events. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet bestrides Ravel's complete solo piano music; Bryn Terfel takes the title role in Puccini's one-act *Gianni Schicchi*; and heading off the classical piste, there's jazz from the Brad Mehldau Trio.

Pärnu Music Festival

Pärnu, Estonia, 16-25 July

parnumusicfestival.ee

Lapped by the Gulf of Riga, Estonia's unofficial summer capital has the nation's veteran composer in its sights as it celebrates Arvo Pärt's 90th birthday. The festival does him proud in four concerts by the Estonian Festival Orchestra under Paavo Järvi; Neeme Järvi conducts the haunting *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, while his other son, Kristjan, and Nordic Pulse combine Pärt's music with improvisation and new works.

Marvão International Music Festival

Marvão, Portugal, 18-27 July

marvaomusic.com

With its imposing castle and glorious sunsets bathing the Serra de São Mamede, Marvão's outdoor music festival was a no-brainer when launched in 2014. The tenth anniversary behind it, returning artists and debutantes include pianist Pavel Kolesnikov, tenors Christoph and Julian Prégardien, as well as Quatuor Arod. And among others, Schoenberg, Webern and Richard Strauss are the subject of deftly painted composer portraits. Beneath the stars, late-night Fado and Messiaen beckon.

Gstaad Menuhin Festival

Gstaad, Switzerland, 18 July – 6 September

gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch

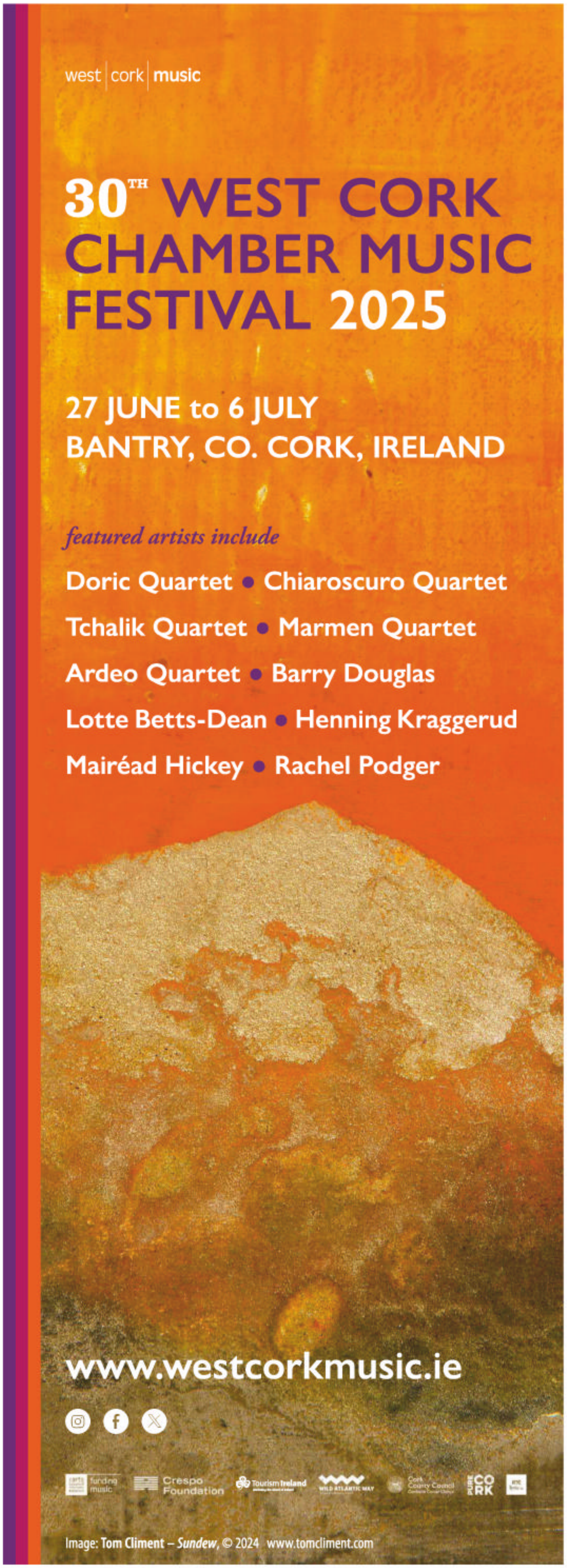
The encouragement of young talent was central to the festival violinist Yehudi Menuhin established in 1957, and this spirit lives on in an ambitious Academy that fertilises a programme dwelling on 'Migration' this year. It's a rich theme richly explored, including dives into exile and nostalgia. Shostakovich 50 is honoured; yodelling embraced; and violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja tackles notions of 'origin' and 'challenge'. Directed by William Christie, Les Arts Florissants set the migratory ball rolling with Handel's *Israel in Egypt*.

Salzburg Festival

Salzburg, Austria, 18 July – 31 August

salzburgfestival.at

'The endgame of human existence' stalks a 2025 Salzburg summer, and that plays out in an opera programme which marries Schoenberg and Mahler,



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Everything's all right: Jean Rondeau's ensemble Nevermind performs in Haapsalu; (right) Mischa Maisky heads to Venice; (top right) Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla conducts in Berlin

delights in two very different *Macbeths* (by Verdi and Sciarrino), fashions a pasticcio out of Vivaldi, and features Evgeny Titov's new production of Eötvös's Chekhov-indebted *Three Sisters*. Salzburg is rarely slow off the mark when it comes to anniversaries – mustering artists including pianists Igor Levit and Evgeny Kissin, plus the Vienna Phil under Andris Nelsons, seven concerts salute 50 years since Shostakovich's death, while the centenary of Boulez's birth chalks up five.

Haapsalu Early Music Festival

Haapsalu, Estonia, 24-27 July

studiovocale.ee

Where Russian royalty and celebrities including Tchaikovsky once came for seaside summer refreshment, Haapsalu refreshes musical spirits still – and last year notched up three decades of an early music festival that boasts an Early Music Youth Camp to boot. Ensembles from Poland, Norway and Latvia include Trio Mediæval and Tumult Ensemble, while the final concert re-invites harpsichordist Jean Rondeau, whose ensemble Nevermind give Bach's *Goldberg Variations* an instrumentally expanded makeover.

Rosendal Chamber Music Festival

Baroniet Rosendal, Norway, 6-10 August

baroniet.no

Soprano Mari Eriksmoen, pianist James Baillieu and violist Timothy Ridout are among the musicians joining artistic director Leif Ove Andsnes for a final edition of the chamber music festival he founded nearly a decade ago. Grieg, who lived in the area for two years, is the focus, as are composers Geirr Tveitt and Knut Vaage – Hardanger enthusiasts all. The influence of honorary Leipzigers Schumann and Mendelssohn is noted with a nod to the young Grieg's studies at the city's Conservatory; and, in anniversary year, Ravel and Shostakovich are not forgotten.

Lucerne Festival

Lucerne, Switzerland, 12 August – 14 September

lucernefestival.ch

What with the Spring Festival, Piano Fest and the contemporary music Forward Festival each November, Lucerne is positively festivals central. And never more so than in summer, when a month-long jamboree scarcely pauses for breath. 'Open End' is the 2025 theme which dovetails neatly with a celebration of Pierre Boulez, who founded the Festival Academy and habitually revised his compositions. Marco Stoppa is composer-in-residence, and new works by Dai Fujikura and Olga Neuwirth spike period Wagner, lakeside Mahler and Charpentier from Les Arts Florissants.

George Enescu International Festival

Bucharest, Romania, 24 August – 21 September

festivalenescu.ro

Bucharest is awash with anniversaries this year – and not just the usual suspects. It's 70 years since the death of violinist-composer George Enescu, and the festival named after him celebrates one of Romania's own with performances of over 45 of his works,

CLÉMENT VAYSSIÈRES, GETTY, ANDREAS HECHENBERGER

including the opera *Œdipe*. New to the cornucopia of tantalising strands is one at the MINA Museum combining music with the visual arts; and among over 80 visiting ensembles are the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Il Giardino Armonico.

Musikfest Berlin

Berlin, Germany, 30 August – 23 September

berlinerfestspiele.de/musikfest-berlin

As exuberant warm-ups go, Musikfest Berlin makes quite the statement! A prequel announcing the imminent arrival of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's new season, it lures orchestras from around the world together with instrumental and choral ensembles, and in addition showcases the city's other great orchestras. The first week leans Frenchwards with the Orchestre de Paris conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France under Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, and the period forces of Philippe Herreweghe's Orchestre des Champs-Élysées and Collegium Vocale Gent. Not to be outdone, Les Siècles gives two concerts on one night, the second devoted exclusively to the music of Boulez. And to begin, introducing the Berio centenary tributes, conductor Klaus Mäkelä and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra preface Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra with the Italian modernist's love letter to Schubert: *Rendering*.

Wratislavia Cantans

Wrocław, Poland, 4-14 September

nfm.wroclaw.pl

With Vox Luminis, John Eliot Gardiner's new Constellation Choir and Orchestra and Wagner's *Parsifal*, the human voice is never far away in elegant Wrocław's late summer festival. The clue, after all, is in the title. But not everything has a song in its heart as the theme of 'Paradise Lost (?)' is unwrapped. As well as Ensemble Intercontemporain, Les Percussions de Strasbourg, the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra and pianist Martha Argerich, JS Bach's *Art of Fugue* is re-imagined for chamber ensemble.

Epicenter Venice

Venice, Italy, 5-7 September

epicentervenice.com

During La Serenissima's 17th- and 18th-century musical heyday you might have bumped into Monteverdi crossing Piazza San Marco or shared a canal-side glass of wine with Vivaldi or Handel. Pianist Alexandros Kapelis wonders why the city, home to several major international festivals, lacks a flagship festival devoted to classical music. And having trialled a prototype two years ago, he launches the first edition of a line-up spanning 500 years of music across 19 concerts and venues including private palazzi. Among those dipping a toe in the inaugural water are mezzo Joyce DiDonato, cellist Mischa Maisky and the Berliner Barock Solisten – the early music offshoot of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

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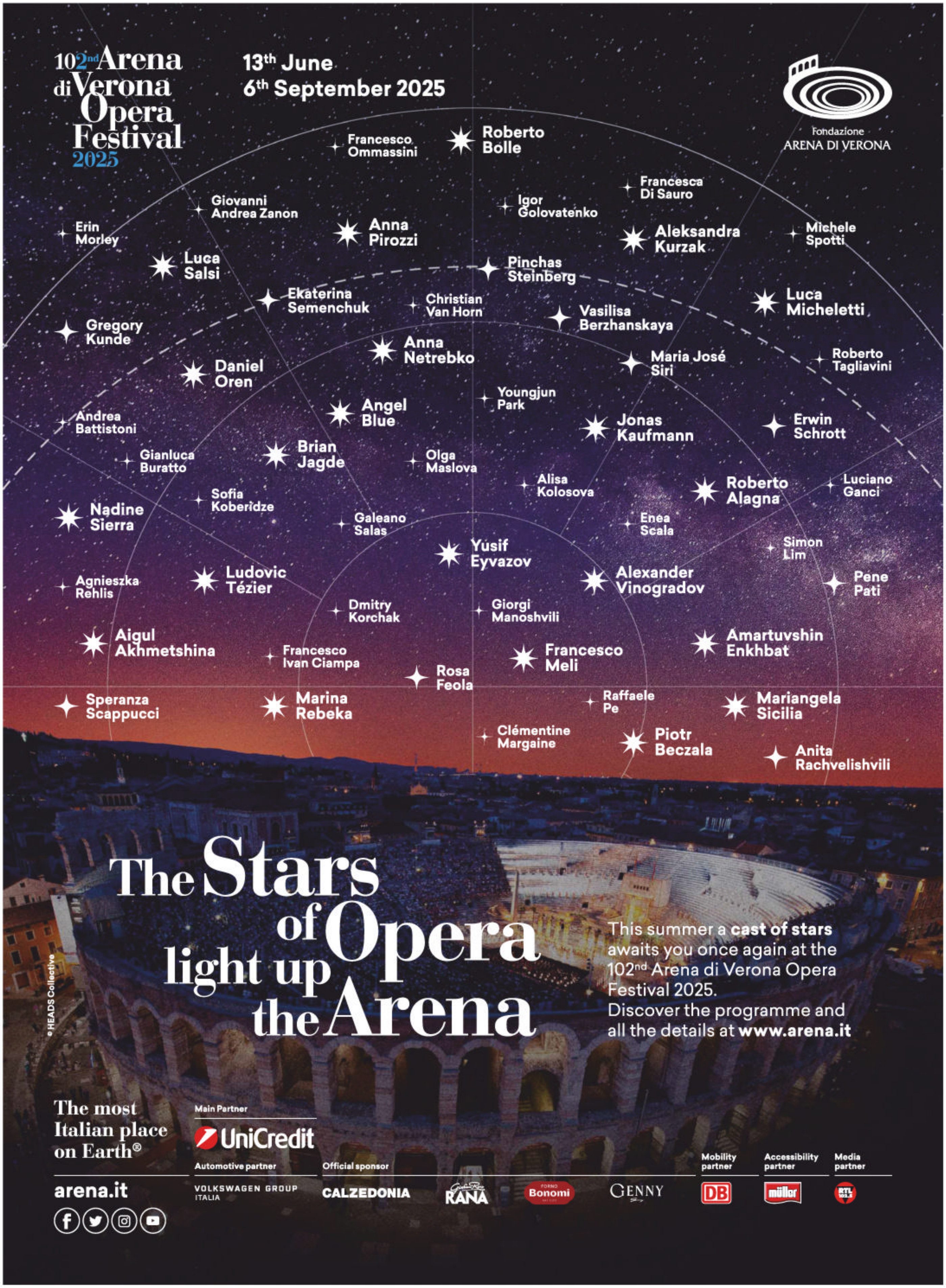

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North America & Canada

A shining light: Renée Fleming takes the artistic helm at Cincinnati's May Festival

May Festival

Cincinnati, OH, 16-24 May

mayfestival.com

It's all change at Cincinnati's choralfest, as soprano Renée Fleming takes the artistic helm. She revisits her Grammy Award-winning disc *Voice of Nature: The Anthropocene* and joins baritone Rod Gilfry for Kevin Puts's *The Brightness of Light*. Massed choirs are 'Chasing the Dawn' in works by Richard Strauss and Lili Boulanger, while the opening night features Verdi's Requiem.

Spoleto Festival USA

Charleston, SC, 23 May – 8 June

spoletousa.org

Charleston's multi-faceted festival is an omnivorous affair, welcoming Manual Cinema's bold take on *Macbeth* as well as the aerial wizardry of Australian company Gravity and Other Myths. But, founded by composer Gian Carlo Menotti, music remains its beating heart, and Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* spooks Dock Street Theatre; cellist Alisa Weilerstein pairs Bach with new commissions; and marking its Spoleto debut, the Kronos Quartet introduces a new piece by Charlton Singleton.

OSL Bach Festival

New York, 3-24 June

oslmusic.org

The Orchestra of St Luke's has a busy summer ahead at Caramoor, but first the Big Apple takes a bite out of Bach. The composer's German arrangement of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater is directed by Lionel Meunier at the start of a festival that concludes with the complete *Brandenburg Concertos*. Pianist Angela Hewitt mixes Bach with Mozart, while violinist Théotime Langlois de Swarte injects a French Baroque perspective.

Ojai Festival

Ojai, CA, 5-8 June

ojaifestival.org

2025's Ojai director is flautist Claire Cooper, who steps into shoes previously occupied by Pierre Boulez, John Adams and Aaron Copland. 'Landscape' underpins a programme which, she suggests, conjures 'thinking forests, liberated rivers, endangered charms… and reimagined communities'. Terry Riley's *The Holy Liftoff* and the West Coast premiere of *Pulsefield* celebrate the composer's 90th birthday, and in another West Coast premiere, Liza Lim's *Sex Magic* combines Chase's fearsome contrabass flute and electronics.

Ravinia Festival

Highland Park, IL, 6 June – 31 August

ravinia.org

North America's veteran music festival turns 125 next year and has embarked on an ambitious programme of renewal at its Highland Park home. First in line for a makeover is the iconic Pavilion, which should be ready in time for the upcoming season. Conductor Marin Alsop undertakes the lion's share of the resident Chicago Symphony Orchestra's concerts; new and recent works by Joan Tower, Malek Jandali and Joel Thompson rub shoulders with Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony; and, semi-staged, Handel's *Alcina* works her potent operatic magic.

Boston Early Music Festival

Boston, MA, 8-15 June

bemf.org

'Love and Power' supply the propulsion for this year's biennial festival, both combined in a new production of Reinhard Keiser's 1705 opera *Octavia*. And as well as a Telemann double bill, bolstered by a lively fringe and trade fair, 18 concerts assemble The Tallis Scholars twice over, Ensemble Castor and Trio Medieval, who forge an Anglo-German

ANDREW ECCLES, BARD GUNDERSEN, BSO

alliance between Hildegard of Bingen and Leonel Power.

Music Academy of the West

Santa Barbara, CA, 15 June – 9 August

musicacademy.org

Early faculty members included Lotte Lehmann, Otto Klemperer and Arnold Schoenberg. Quite the pedigree! And the legacy continues with pianist Jeremy Denk and the Takács Quartet. Denk leads an exploration of Beethoven's chamber music; Mozart's *Don Giovanni* seduces; a percussion extravaganza showcases new work; and, marking the film's 50th anniversary, 'Jaws in Concert' revisits John Williams's chilling score.

Bravo! Vail

Vail, CO, 19 June – 31 July

bravovail.org

Not content with its customary four orchestras-in-residence – The Chamber Orchestra of Europe making its Bravo! Vail debut alongside flagship stalwarts from Dallas, Philadelphia and New York – there's a fifth: Mexico's Sinfonica de Minería. More than 70 concerts enrich a Colorado summer including Brahms's piano concertos performed by Yefim Bronfman. And (following a new work by Jessie Montgomery and the Stravinsky Violin Concerto performed by Patricia Kopatchinskaja), Brahms's First Symphony concludes Jakub Hrůša's opener with the New York Philharmonic. At Vail Golf Clubhouse, 'Classically Uncorked' raises a convivial glass or two.

Seattle Chamber Music Festival

Seattle, WA, 20 June – 1 August

seattlechambermusic.org

From Benaroya Hall to public parks and more than a dozen concerts dispensed from a truck, violinist James Ehnes's celebration of chamber music likes to put itself about. Specially commissioned works are stitched into a programme summoning international artists returning and new. And alongside open rehearsals as well as lectures, for the fearless there are sight-reading parties!

Tanglewood

Lenox, MA, 21 June – 31 August

tanglewood.org

From Barenaked Ladies to star-studded Beethoven, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summertime home is the model of inclusivity – whether sporting a contemporary music festival-within-a-festival or signing off in the company of Bonnie Raitt. Daniil Trifonov is part of a distinguished cohort of pianists including Emanuel Ax, who premieres a new piano concerto by John Williams, and, scaling Ravel's complete solo piano music, Seong-Jin Cho. There's more Ravel, too, as *L'enfant et les sortilèges* vies for the operatic crown with Puccini's *Tosca*. Among festival newcomers are The Sixteen, Brooklyn Rider and intrepid Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto.

Caramoor Festival

Katonah, NY, 21 June – 3 August

caramoor.org

In a Spanish Courtyard, Venetian Theater and a magnificent Music Room, from folk and classical to world music and jazz, multi-tasking Caramoor has a perfectly tailored space for all eventualities. Beethoven sounds an 'Ode to Joy' to launch the festival; there's operatic Monteverdi and Telemann; and, as well as Sō Percussion and The Knights, the piano trio dream team of Leonidas Kavakos, Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma.

Bard Summerscape and Music Festival

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 27 June – 17 August

fishercenter.bard.edu

Beethoven meets dance plus composer Caroline Shaw as architect Frank Gehry's inspiring arts centre lifts the lid on Summerscape '25. Visuals by Sarah Crowner complete choreographer Pam Tanowitz's response to Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony; and following Jean-Romain Vesperini's new production of Smetana's *Dalibor,* Martinů is the subject of this year's festival deep dive which concludes with a semi-staged *Julietta*.

Intrepid and inclusive: violinist Pekka Kuusisto (right) and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (left) are at Tanglewood

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At the top of her game: composer Joan Tower is celebrated at Maverick's woodland 'chapel' (right)

NEIL LARSON, GETTY

Santa Fe Opera

Santa Fe, NM, 27 June – 23 August

santafeopera.org

In 1957, John Crosby launched Santa Fe Opera, now a destination festival that lures visitors from far and wide to savour opera under a New Mexico night sky. Luring them this year is a new production of Puccini's *La bohème* and, conducted by James Gaffigan, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* in a festival first. Director Louisa Muller stages Britten's Henry James-derived *The Turn of the Screw*, which joins Verdi's *Rigoletto* and a revival of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*.

Maverick Concerts

Hurley, Woodstock, NY,
28 June – 14 September

maverickconcerts.org

Maverick marks Ravel's 150th birthday and the 60th of Russell Platt (whose Clarinet Concerto is premiered in a new chamber ensemble guise). Its woodland 'chapel' also resonates to the sound of women composers, most particularly that of Hudson Valley doyenne Joan Tower. A Woodstock summer ends with the world premiere of her String Quartet No. 6, and she's the soloist for her 2022 *Love Letter* for piano. Clara Schumann is fêted, Joan Baez celebrated, and, in 'Fauré at Sunset', Michael Stephen Brown plays the complete piano Nocturnes.

Aspen Music Festival and School

Aspen, CO, 2 July – 24 August

aspenmusicfestival.com

Aspen is a Mecca for the musically curious and boasts over 400 events each season. Soprano Renée Fleming joins conductor Robert Spano as co-artistic director, and headlining this year is the world premiere of Christopher Theofanidis's opera *Siddhartha, She*. There's also the US premiere of Thomas Adès's *The Origin of the Harp* and new music by Anna Clyne, Nico Muhly and Matthias Pintscher. Among Aspen debutants are pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, conductor Stéphane Denève, and duos from violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and cellist Sol Gabetta.

Grand Teton Music Festival

Jackson Hole, WY, 3 July – 23 August

gtmf.org

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has been absent from Wyoming's spectacularly sited festival for almost a decade, but that gets put right when music director Donald Runnicles conducts the Festival Orchestra on opening night. The recently introduced operatic strand continues with a semi-staged performance of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, the Gateway Series includes crack vocalists Chanticleer, and mezzo Sasha Cooke premieres a song cycle by Alex Turley.

Colorado Music Festival

Boulder, CO, 3 July – 3 August

coloradomusicfestival.org

Eclecticism and risk-taking are conductor Peter Oundjian's twin ambitions for the festival he's curated since 2019. Against the majestic Rockies, Chautauqua Auditorium is home to a handpicked Festival Orchestra of players from across two continents. A chamber strand invites the Dover and Brentano string quartets, while 'Music of Today' includes the world premiere of Joan Tower's new sax concerto *Love Returns*.

Newport Classical Music Festival

Newport, RI, 4-22 July

newportclassical.org

Whether in the historic mansions that dot Rhode Island or the al fresco delights of King Park and Norman Bird Sanctuary, Newport Classical shows there's more to the city than its sporty golden age. Festival composer-in-residence is Cris Derksen; anniversary Ravel proliferates; and as well as visiting artists the Gesualdo Six and violinist Leila Josefowicz, the US premiere of a new work by David Lang awaits.

Festival Napa Valley

Napa Valley, CA, 5-20 July

festivalnapavalley.org

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Bach at the beach: Grete Pedersen conducts at Carmel in California

TOMMY SLACK

year-round mission for Festival Napa Valley. But come July, the festival 'proper' beckons – liberally lubricated with the local wine, fine dining and sun-soaked vistas. Versailles Royal Opera presents Donizetti's *The Daughter of the Regiment* and mezzo Joyce DiDonato seasons a flavoursome feast that includes hot jazz and Jon Batiste. Tuck in!

Toronto Summer Music

Toronto, ON, 10 July – 2 August

torontosummermusic.com

Toronto Summer Music's Festival and Academy this year present a 20th-anniversary edition that bids adieu to violinist and director Jonathan Crow, as he bows out on a high. Among 2025's artists are the Calidore, Rosamunde and New Orford string quartets, soprano Mary Bevan and pianist Roger Vignoles.

Glimmerglass Festival

Cooperstown, NY, 11 Jul – 17 August

glimmerglass.org

Glimmerglass's 50th anniversary boasts a night with Broadway superstar Bernadette Peters, which complements the staging of Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, while 'Pipeline Talk: From Page to Stage' charts the journey informing the world premiere of Derek Bermel's *The House on Mango Street*. Other Lake Otsego temptations include Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (a company first), and Puccini's *Tosca*.

Carmel Bach Festival

Carmel, CA, 12-26 July

bachfestival.org

As it approaches its 90th season, Carmel Bach Festival presents some 40 concerts and events in Carmel, Monterey and Pebble Beach. Under the artistic leadership of Grete Pedersen, Mozart's Requiem and the Haydn *Harmoniemesse* take their place alongside Bach's B minor Mass; route maps to Mendelssohn and Stravinsky are forged; and Nordic folklore and nyckelharpa are entwined.

Stratford Summer Music

Stratford, ON, Canada, 17 July – 10 August

stratfordsummermusic.ca

Stratford Summer Music notches up its quarter-century with aplomb. MusicBarge, a floating stage on the River Avon, hosts an afternoon series; pianist Stewart Goodyear navigates Bach's *Goldberg Variations*; the SSM Jazz All-Stars are at Revival House; and *Carmina Burana* raises the roof on opening night.

Music@Menlo

Menlo, CA, 18 July – 9 August

musicatmenlo.org

'Constellations: Ensemble Magic' is the watchword at Menlo this year – directed, as ever with panache, by pianist Wu Han and cellist David Finckel. Cart Blanche, Café conversations and multimedia encounters illuminate, while seven mainstage recitals traverse 'Duo Dialogues' through 'Trio Transformations' to 'Quintessential Quintets' and beyond. Celebrating his 90th birthday, pianist Gilbert Kalish tackles Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, not to mention Bach and Webern.

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music

Santa Cruz, CA, 27 July – 10 August

cabrillomusic.org

California's annual rendezvous with the new and nearly new presents over 20 composers (12 in residence) alongside its Festival Orchestra, three world premieres, four festival commissions, and an underpinning shout-out to the 50th anniversary of LGBTQ+ Pride in Santa Cruz. As well as music by Lou Harrison, John Corigliano and Jennifer Higdon, there are premieres by Jake Heggie and Darian Donovan Thomas.

Sun Valley Music Festival

Sun Valley, ID, 28 July – 21 August

svmusicfestival.org

Wreathed by mountains, Sun Valley's Pavilion is almost as much of a draw as the festival's astute programming. Apart from a Gala featuring pianist Yuja Wang, its concerts are free! Time for Three premiere a new triple concerto by Mason Bates; cellist Gautier Capuçon plays Elgar; and an all-Ravel evening marks the composer's 150th birthday.

Tippet Rise

Fishtail, MT, 15 Aug – 14 September

tippetrise.org

Tippet Rise is no ordinary sheep and cattle ranch. A catalyst for the arts, its August mini-festival inaugurates a concert season stretching into September that, encouraged by ensembles such as yMusic and Brooklyn Rider, likes to push boundaries. New works by Gabriella Smith and Angélica Négron, returning pianists Stephen Hough and George Li, plus a line-up ranging from Stockhausen to *Mary Poppins* are heralded by Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* interspersed with the sounds of nature.

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Rest of the World

Natural talent: violinist Inmo Yang performs in Taiwan; (below) Philip Glass is celebrated in Abu Dhabi and Canberra

Abu Dhabi Festival

United Arab Emirates, year-long

abudhabifestival.ae

Its year-round collaborative reach ensures that from Paris to Seoul, Singapore to China, the festival's impact isn't confined to the Emirates. Back on home ground, Japan is this year's 'Country of Honour' and the New Japan Philharmonic got things off to a flying start with two concerts in February. But other traditions apply. The Labèque sisters salute Philip Glass and Ravel; violinist Augustin Hadelich mixes Bach, Coleridge-Taylor and David Lang; and shape-shifting Riley Mulherkar blows his own eclectic trumpet.

Weiwuying International Music Festival

National Kaohsiung Centre for the Arts, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 11-20 April

npac-weiwuying.org

Architecturally inspired by the leafy canopy of the banyan tree, the National Kaohsiung Centre for the Arts is quite the home for a festival of conspicuous ambition and flair. Comprising an opera house, recital hall, playhouse and concert hall, it gives artistic directors composer Unsuk Chin and her pianist husband Maris Gothóni plenty of room for manoeuvre. 'Quiet Revolution' is the theme for an edition that invites Augusta Read Thomas as composer-in-residence and shines a festival focus on pianist Dezsö Ránki, violinist Inmo Yang and countertenor Kangmin Justin Kim. Szymanowski and Zemlinsky raise the curtain as Constantin Trinks conducts the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra.

Whakatipu Music Festival

Queenstown, New Zealand, 18-21 April

michaelhillviolincompetition.co.nz

Savouring the seductive backdrop of Lake Whakatipu, the festival likes to mix things up – from international artists to emerging talent, community initiatives to a programme embracing anything from Bach to Broadway. And new for 2025, Whakatipu dips a toe into choral waters, teaming up with trailblazing Choirs Aotearoa.

Canberra International Music Festival

Canberra, Australia, 30 April – 4 May

cimf.org.au

Flying the flag of 'Liberté', Canberra '25 cries freedom – whether in a concert that insists 'The Iron Curtain isn't soundproof', or the closing night's choral conquest of Sibelius's *Finlandia*. Finnish-Australian links are celebrated; bagpipes, bombards and Binious salute Philip

In tip-top shape: the Aoi Trio return to Suntory Hall; (top left) Stellenbosch founder and pianist Nina Schumann; (left) Karina Canellakis conducts Bernstein in Sapporo, Japan

EMMA WERNIG, MATHIAS BOTHOR, NIKOLAJ LUND, GETTY

Glass; and in a nod to transparency, Shock Lines mounts a site-specific journey through Canberra's Glassworks where, en route, Mozart encounters glass percussion and electronics.

Coriole Music Festival

McLaren Vale, Australia, 17, 18 May

coriolemusicfestival.com

Hunkered down among the rolling vineyards of McLaren Vale, Coriole has been raising a glass to two to the art of chamber music for a quarter of a century. A knife and fork too: choice cuisine nourishes a theme exploring 'Musical Crossroads' as Ravel 150 is remembered; a new cello sonata by Richard Mills is swaddled in songs by Richard Strauss; and Unsuk Chin goes head-to-head with Brahms's Hungarian-gypsy-infused G minor Piano Quartet.

Suntory Hall Chamber Music Garden

Suntory Hall, Tokyo, 7-22 June

suntory.com

In a Tokyo June, chamber music blossoms, and this year's festival unfurls to the rich timbres of a cello quartet probing Bach and Frescobaldi. Alongside a formidable-sounding 'Concert for Challenged Children', named after three of its sibling members, the Schumann Quartet from Germany shoulders a Beethoven cycle; Debussy prefaces the exquisite moonbathing of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*; and visitors include the Hedenborg Trio, the Israel Chamber Project and the returning Aoi Trio.

Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival

Stellenbosch, South Africa, 4-14 July

sicmf.co.za

Its mission unique across the African continent, Stellenbosch notches up a 20th-anniversary celebration with a spring in its step. Public masterclasses are interleaved with guest ensemble concerts, and student performances drawing on some 250 participants augment contributions from the Festival Orchestra. Masterminding it all is pianist and festival founder Nina Schumann.

Pacific Music Festival

Sapporo, Japan, 9-29 July

pmf.or.jp

Giving young musicians from across the world an opportunity to learn and perform together, an Academy is at the heart of the festival Leonard Bernstein established some three-and-a-half decades ago. And it falls to his fizzing *Candide Overture* to launch this year's edition under conductor Karina Canellakis. Members of the Philharmonics of Vienna and Berlin collaborate in chamber music; the PMF Host Concert pairs Schubert and Shostakovich; Marek Janowski, meanwhile, conducts Wagner, Schumann and Richard Strauss to wrap things up.

Jerusalem Lyric Opera Festival

Jerusalem, Israel, 22-24 July

lyric-opera.org

Conducted by Patrick Baton, Neeme Kuningas's new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* closes a festival that also boasts Handel's *Rinaldo*, a popular triumph at its 1711 London premiere. But Jerusalem likes to ring the changes. An all-Bartók concert acknowledges the 80th anniversary of the composer's death; musicals and operetta are drawn into the gregarious fold; and a bel canto matinee namechecks Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini.

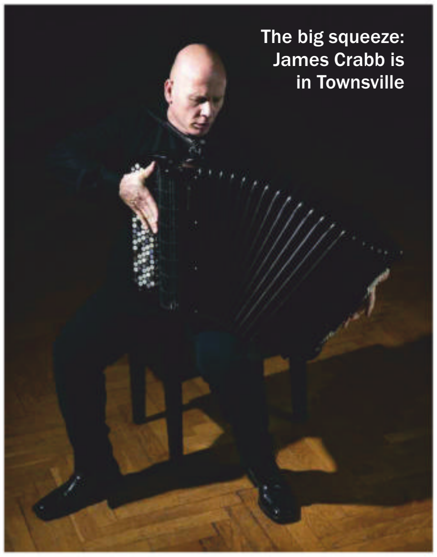
Rest of the World

Bachfest Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 23-27 July

bachfestmalaysia.com

2024 was a landmark year for Bachfest Malaysia, as its Festival Singers and Orchestra made their Leipzig Bachfest debut in that Bachian holy of holies: St Thomas' Church. This year is shaping up to be just as auspicious. Founded by David Chin in 2015, the festival celebrates its 10th anniversary and as the centrepiece proposes a performance of the *St Matthew Passion*. Solo recitals include the *Goldberg Variations* and solo violin Partitas, while the finale treats the Thomaskantor to a jazzy makeover.



The big squeeze: James Crabb is in Townsville

CHRISTOFFER ASKMAN

Australian Festival of Chamber Music

Townsville, North Queensland, 25 July – 2 August

afcm.com.au

When it comes to festival venues, the view from Arcadian Surf Club @Alma Bay takes some beating; and what's not to like about a beach concert on Orpheus-Goolboddi Island, promising soprano Carolyn Sampson framed by whale-watching and a spectacular sunset? Violinist Jack Liebeck – now in his fourth year as artistic director – has assembled a lively cohort of musicians including an Australian String Quartet residency, an al fresco appearance by the Barrier Reef Orchestra, and artists such as classical accordionist extraordinaire James Crabb, clarinettist Michael Collins and digeridoo maestro William Mabo. With an exuberant programme spanning Hildegard of Bingen to arrangements of Abba and Radiohead, Townsville truly tantalises!

Taipei Music Academy and Festival

Taipei, Taiwan, 27 July – 10 August

taipeimaf.com

Given a faculty that casts its net over the front desks of orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Dallas Symphony and New York Metropolitan Opera, Taipei guarantees its participants a blue-chip Academy. Following the traditional All-Star Concert and Chamberfest, Fabio Luisi heads a concluding orchestral tour juxtaposing Brahms, Strauss and Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony.

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SCAN ME

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Prague Czechia

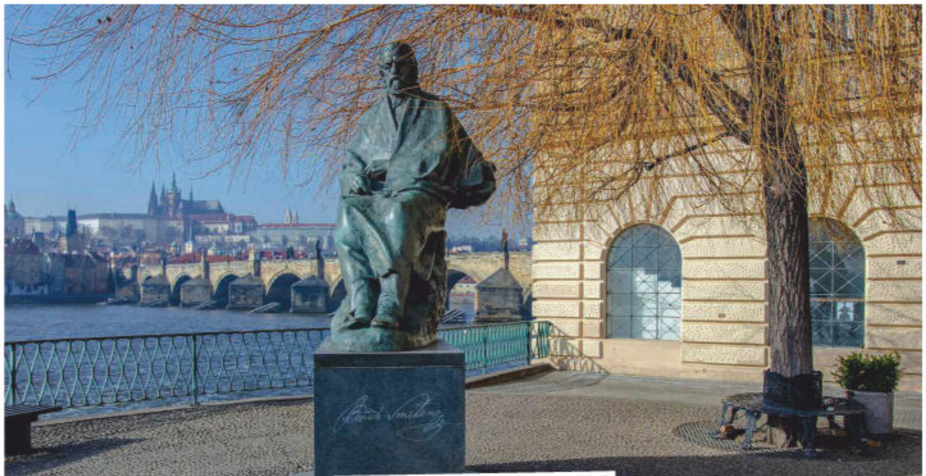
Claire Jackson visits the vibrant home of not one, but two leading Czech composers, each honoured with his own prestigious festival

Czech life: conductor David Robertson and the Czech Phil take a bow at the 2024 Prague Spring closing concert

In a modest, comfortable drawing room at the Bedřich Smetana Memorial in Jabkenice, a grand piano sits by a window that looks out on to a large garden, where two enormous pine trees stand tall. They were planted by Smetana and his wife Bettina, when the couple lived here during the 1870s. Just out of view on one side is Castle Loučeň, where the composer was a frequent visitor, and to the other, the city of Prague. A small pair of spectacles rests behind a glass case; to their left, a wooden decorative box containing a lock of hair. While, for hundreds of years, many have paid their respects to the country's famous relics of Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (see right), more recently, music fans have journeyed to what is now an Unesco world heritage site to connect with Czechia's most famous musician.

At this point you might be shaking your head, perhaps bemoaning a lack of research. Internationally – in the UK, particularly – Dvořák is often considered the more significant Czech composer, despite the popularity of Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*. I give my best rendition of the theme from the 'New World' Symphony and a Yorkshire accent to leading Czech composer Miroslav Srnka as we wonder whether, if Smetana's music was used in a bread advertisement, British audiences might be more familiar with it. Not that Dvořák is under-represented in Prague: a museum, statue and annual festival acknowledges the importance of his contribution.

But it is Smetana whose name is given to the art nouveau concert hall in Municipal



Riverside view; (above) a statue of Smetana outside the Smetana Museum; (right) Georg Friedrich Haas, whose *11,000 Strings* beguiled at the 2024 Prague Spring Festival; (below) a class at Prague Offspring

House (there's a Dvořák Hall in the neo-Renaissance Rudolfinum, home of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra), and it is his symphonic poem *Má Vlast* (My Country) – a collection of six evocative pieces depicting Bohemia's pastoral past – that opens the Prague Spring International Music Festival, the country's biggest classical music event. *Má Vlast* has been performed at every edition since 1952, with the event always opening on 12 May, the anniversary of Smetana's death. 'The opening concert was always played by the Czech Philharmonic,' explains festival director Pavel Trojan. 'The first non-Czech orchestra was the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in 1993, because at that time Libor Pešek was its principal conductor.'

The best events respect and dismantle tradition. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony had always closed the Prague Spring Festival, a fixture akin to *Rule Britannia!* at the Last Night of the Proms. A newly installed artistic board has changed that, demonstrating their commitment to contemporary music with the inclusion of a new piece in the programme. Last year's celebration of Czech music was marked with a bonanza of national treasures, including Janáček's violin concerto *The Wandering of a Little Soul* and Dvořák's *Mazurek*, Op. 49 in E minor for violin and orchestra (with Josef Špaček as the glittering soloist), Suk's *Praga* and Srnka's latest orchestral work *Superorganisms*, a dense and absorbing score commenting on the role of individualism, resources and the future of humanity.

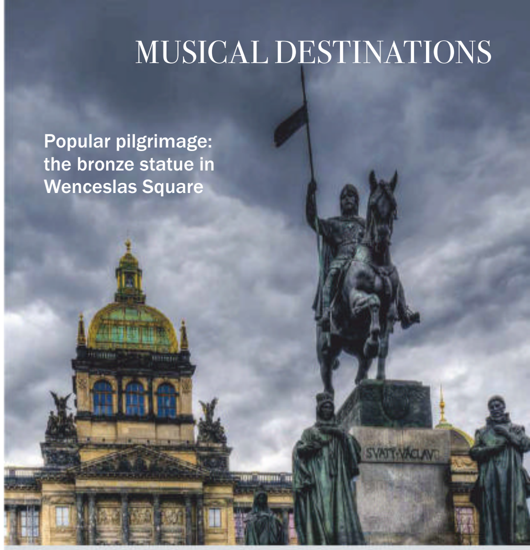
'Contemporary music is spread over the programme as we don't want it to be in a ghetto,' says Trojan, 'but at the same time it's nice to have a focus for those who are coming especially for that.' Focus comes in the form of 'Prague Offspring', an offshoot of the main festival that grew three years ago – students from neighbouring universities are given the opportunity to have their music sightread by a specialist ensemble, which in recent years has been no less than Klangforum Wien. Composers-in-residence have included Rebecca Saunders and Georg Friedrich Haas, whose *11,000 Strings* transformed Forum Karlín, the former home of a steam boiler factory, into a vibrating spectacle as 50 microtonally tuned pianos encircled a bemused and beguiled audience.

Má Vlast has been performed at every edition of the Spring Festival since 1952

Neither Hass nor Saunders are present in the composer caricatures at Hotel Aria, Prague's charmingly quirky music-themed hotel. On the opera floor, Berlioz welcomes visitors, while in my room, a portrait of Mendelssohn coyly holding a top hat keeps a watchful eye over proceedings. The 'Please clean my room' sign comes with further explanation: 'been composing all night'. In musical Prague, that seems highly likely.

The 80th Prague Spring Festival takes place from 12 May to 3 June 2025

Full info: festival.cz/en/



Popular pilgrimage: the bronze statue in Wenceslas Square

Local hero

Wenceslaus I

The remains of Wenceslaus – of 'Good King' fame, although he wasn't technically a monarch – are interred at St Vitus Cathedral, within the Prague Castle complex. Wenceslaus (not Wenceslas, the ubiquitous misspelling) was a 10th-century Bohemian prince who was canonised after he was murdered by his brother. St Vitus became a popular medieval pilgrimage site and the relics, alongside the bronze statue in Wenceslas Square, are still widely revered. The eponymous 19th-century carol was written for the Feast of St Stephen – better-known as Boxing Day – and the traditional Czech anthem 'Saint Wenceslas Chorale' has been adapted by local composers Josef Suk and Pavel Haas.

IVAN MALY, PETRA HAJSKÁ, GETTY, PRAŽSKÉ JARO/PRAGUE SPRING FESTIVAL 2024/MILAN MOŠNA

Composer of the Week is broadcast on Radio 3 at 4pm, Monday to Friday. Programmes in May 2025 are:
28 April – 2 May Jacquet de la Guerre
5-9 May Elgar
12-16 May Bruch
19-23 May Janáček
26-30 May Beethoven

Jean Sibelius

Can we judge a composer's character from their music? With Sibelius, says ***Stephen Johnson***, this would not necessarily appear to be the case

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

Imagine, if you can, that you know only the music of Jean Sibelius and Gustav Mahler – nothing of the men that wrote it. Imagine I then tell you that one of these men (Composer A) was a strict disciplinarian, ran a tight ship professionally and financially, balanced his day job and creative life to near-perfection, was as exacting in his personal life as in his work, and never drank or otherwise indulged to excess. I then tell you that the other (Composer B) was a needy, womanising emotional mess, with a terrifying alcohol dependency, who spent money like water and who sometimes had to be propped up at his desk by his heroically patient wife in a desperate effort to get him to finish a piece on time.

Unless you rightly suspected a trick question, I imagine you'd almost certainly get them the wrong way round. I'm pretty sure I would. Composer B was indeed Jean Sibelius, mythologised in his own lifetime as the austere 'Titan of the Northlands', who rejected Mahler's notion of a kind of symphony that could 'embrace everything' in favour of 'severity of form' and 'profound logic', who was said to have compared his own music to pure spring water – so different from all those lavish continental cocktails (which as a man he would definitely have preferred!). If ever there was a warning against trying to explain artists' work in terms of their life...

Was poet TS Eliot right, then: should we be at pains to separate 'the man that suffers and the mind that creates'? But then Eliot had his reasons for wanting to keep his private life out of the public eye. It depends ultimately on whether 'the man that suffers' sees artistic creation as self-expression or self-transformation: do you simply express who you are or, rather, who you would like to be? Or do you aspire even higher? Like Mahler, Sibelius seems to have seen his work as inspired by someone or something transcendent. He often talks about 'God the Father' in his diaries, fascinatingly putting himself in the classic female role – the receiver of the creative seed, who conceives, internally nurtures the artistic 'child' and brings it to birth.

He seems to have seen his work as inspired by someone or something transcendent

But unlike Mahler, who could pour out his monumental Eighth Symphony in a vertiginous eight weeks, Sibelius worked at his music over and over again. He would make copious sketches and then, even when he'd apparently finished, there would be full-scale reworkings. As a listening experience, the glorious Fifth Symphony (1915-19) may feel like following the course of a river from source to wide-open sea, or like watching a speeded-up film of a plant growing from seed to full flower. But Sibelius compared the process of writing it to moving the tiles around in a mosaic, thrown down from Heaven at random. And what a laborious process it was: four years of more-or-less continuous work, with two major revisions, and all the while the struggle with the lacerating critic in his own head, only silenced with the assistance of massive doses of whisky.

Sibelius's style

GETTY

Tempo Sibelius's (left) love of nature permeates his music, but it goes deeper than mood or simple tone-painting. For instance, wind and water don't move at regular, steady speeds, and his music reflects that increasingly as he develops. Different strands in the texture can seem to be moving at different tempos, like ocean cross-currents, the eddies of a river or the interplay of breezes through tree canopies.

Form Sibelius starts out rooted in classical forms, especially sonata form and rondo, but in time these begin to blur, until he arrives at something that seems to be continuously evolving. Elements of slow movement, scherzo and allegro can be heard in his last symphony, No. 7, but where are the boundaries? It's wonderfully seamless.

Harmony Dissonance was on the rise in music in Sibelius's time, and he can be abrasively discordant too. At the same time, though, he rediscovers the elemental purity of basic tonal harmonies, so that a C major chord, emerging from an aura of dissonance near the start of the Sixth Symphony, sounds like a stunning new discovery.

Orchestration Sibelius's orchestral forces are often restrained, in size and in colour range, especially in the symphonies. But the way he uses even the most familiar instruments creates a sound palate that's like no one else: austere yet rich at the same time.

18 57
ESTABLISHED
GILBEY'S
Royal
OLD
WHISKY

Composers of contrast: the clean-living Mahler (right) was very different from the hard-drinking and smoking Sibelius (below and far right)

Self-editing in musical composition is an intriguing process. You aren't simply editing your thoughts; you're selecting which aspects of yourself you want to present to the world and which you don't. If you reject a musical idea as banal or sentimental, it is you, and no one else, who conceived that idea, and it is as authentically 'you' as any of your most sublime inspirations. Sibelius's musical self-criticism is also personal self-criticism.

It is striking that, compared to Mahler – who famously needed a combination of Freud and Fate to tell him that he'd simultaneously deified and neglected his wife Alma – Sibelius shows, if intermittently, that he was acutely aware of his own failings, and was genuinely pained by the effect they had on Aino, his aforementioned wife. He made strenuous efforts to overcome them, including consulting his psychiatrist brother, Christian. Towards the end of his long life he does seem to have had some success, but by then he'd gratefully thrown off the Atlas-like burden of creation. Sibelius's daughter Katarina noted that he seemed much happier after he'd given up composing.

Reading Sibelius's copious private writings, one often gets the impression he knew there was something better he could aspire to – something which, for all the pain it cost him, he at least stood a chance of achieving in his work. His diaries around the time he wrote his Fourth Symphony (1909-11) are particularly revealing. The year before he started work on the Fourth, he had undergone an operation in Berlin to remove a tumour from his throat. Terrified of the cancer returning, Sibelius achieved the near-impossible and, for a while, managed to give up alcohol and cigars.

The withdrawal effects were terrible, though. His diaries are full of entries that might sound melodramatic if it weren't for the background evidence of excruciating mental turmoil: 'When will I… be able to concentrate my mind and have the stamina to carry it all through. I managed when I had cigars and wine, but now I have to find new ways. I must! I must! The corpses still rise to the surface. Help!! Du musst dich zusammenraffen [You must pull yourself together]. If only I could rid myself of these dark shadows. Or at least put them into some new perspective… You mustn't go under, there's too much on the plus side.'

> 'I managed when I had cigars and wine, but now I have to find new ways. I must! I must!'

But there's that crucial line: 'put them into some new perspective'. The shadows can't be exorcised, but might it be possible to view them objectively, as a spectator watching the emotional maelstrom from the relative safety of a nearby cliff-edge? That, I think, is what Sibelius did in his Fourth. After the self-taming concentration of the neo-classical Third, he realised he needed new techniques, a new manner of address to give form to what he was feeling, and in the process put it into perspective. He tries out strange new scales, piles dissonance on dissonance, plays with tempo – thereby creating that typically Sibelian effect of different strands in the texture moving at different speeds. And in the devastating *Largo*, he creates a completely new form: to borrow a phrase from Vaughan Williams (a huge Sibelius admirer), 'variations in search of a theme'. Tiny motivic 'seeds' cluster, form longer lines that strain heavenward. At the climax, it appears that a nobly tragic theme has been created – only to be struck down by dissonant *fortississimo* trombones.

The *Largo*'s frozen ending seems to indicate that hope has vanished; and yet in confronting failure, internal emptiness, the absolute negation of mortality, Sibelius has somehow faced down his 'dark shadows' and, in the act of expressing it so superbly, perhaps restored hope. Someone once remarked to Samuel Beckett that there wasn't much hope in his work. 'If I didn't hope', replied the playwright, 'why would I write?'

From the Fourth's dark psychological triumph there emerges a series of masterpieces in which formal and spiritual discovery are symbiotically linked. Originally, the Fifth was in four movements, the first two a *moderato* followed by an accelerating *scherzo* based on the same material. But at some stage Sibelius was struck by the dazzling idea of having the *scherzo* emerge seamlessly from the *moderato*, so that it's impossible

GETTY

to say where one ends and the other begins. The result is one of the most thrilling, elemental transitions in all music. Just before the Fifth, the similarly much-revised tone poem *Oceanides* (1914) develops the tempo-strand innovations from the Fourth Symphony into a fabulously rich evocation of variegated marine currents and cross-currents.

In Sibelius's last two great orchestral works, that sense of formal-spiritual revelation becomes all-pervasive. In his awe-inspiring evocation of the immense northern forests, *Tapiola* (1925-6), a sustained B, either played or implied, persists through the entire work, enduring shadowy menace, extreme isolation and a terrifying storm, to emerge at the end in a wonderfully warm Amen-like B major cadence. Existential threat has been faced, and the sense of self emerges stronger. In the Seventh Symphony (1924), Sibelius fuses slow movement, *scherzo* and finale in a process of continuous becoming as seamless as the first movement of the Fifth, its structural backbone a glorious thrice-heard trombone theme identified in the sketches with his 'rock', Aino. Somehow a lifetime of experience is condensed into a single movement lasting not much more than 20 minutes. Hard to believe that the man who engineered this so stunningly was only getting through by downing so much whisky that it provoked Aino into the biggest showdown of their married life.

So, was Eliot's contemporary WB Yeats right? Is there a choice between 'perfection of the life, or of the work'? Quite a few egomaniacal artists and would-be artists have used something like that as an excuse for appalling behaviour, particularly to those nearest and dearest. But it was a belief shared by Sibelius and the magnificent Aino that that 'work' mattered above all. It mattered as a galvanic force in their native Finland's struggle for independence from Russian domination, and it mattered as an example of what the human mind can achieve: when it looks beyond the ego to nature for inspiration, and when it is prepared to face its own 'dark shadows' honestly and courageously. It is up to us whether we simply enjoy what Sibelius achieved, from a safe distance, or apply those lessons to our own lives.

JEAN SIBELIUS Life&Times

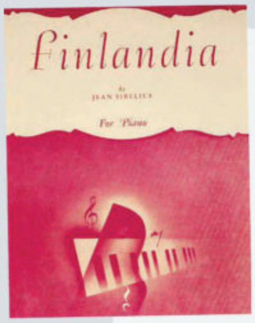
1865

LIFE: Johan (later Jean) Sibelius is born on 8 December in **Hämeenlinna**, Finland, the second of three children in a Swedish-speaking family. His musical talent as a child is encouraged by his uncle Pehr.

TIMES: Engineer Fredrik Idestam founds a pulp mill near the Finnish city of Tampere, later opening a second mill near Nokia, after which he names his new company.

1900

LIFE: A tour of Europe with the Helsinki Philharmonic enables him to showcase recent works such as his First Symphony and ***Finlandia***, the latter a covert protest against Russian oppression.



TIMES: The German philosopher ***Friedrich Nietzsche***, author of influential works such as *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the concept of the 'Übermensch' ('Superman'), dies aged 55 in Weimar.

1915

LIFE: On his 50th birthday, he conducts the first performance of his Fifth Symphony, whose final movement's main theme is inspired by the sight of migrating swans above his house.

TIMES: More than 1,000 civilians lose their lives when, en route from New York to Liverpool, the ocean liner *RMS Lusitania* is sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland.

1926

LIFE: Conducted by Walter Damrosch, his *Tapiola* is given its world premiere by the New York Symphony Orchestra. It will prove to be the last substantial work he ever composes

TIMES: Explorer Roald Amundsen and a tri-national crew fly over the North Pole in the airship *Norge*, from which they drop Norwegian, US and Italian flags onto the ice.

1904

LIFE: Urged by friends and his wife Aino to move away from the destructive temptations of Helsinki, he moves to Ainola, a new home in Järvenpäa, deep in the Finnish forest.

TIMES: Nikolay Bobrikov, the Governor-General of Finland who has introduced a wide-ranging programme of Russification, is shot dead by Finnish nationalist Eugen Schauman.

1957

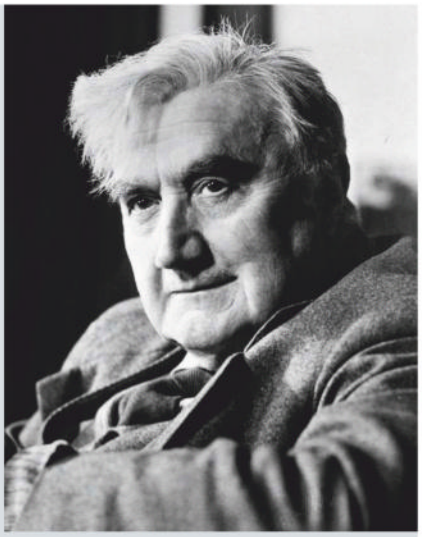
LIFE: Aged 91, he dies of a cerebral haemorrhage on 20 September and is buried in the grounds of Ainola. He is survived by ***Aino***, who will go on to live to the age of 97.

TIMES: Featuring a chess match between Death and the knight Antonius Block, played by Max von Sydow, director Ingmar Bergman's ***The Seventh Seal*** opens in cinemas across Sweden.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Dona Nobis Pacem

Rebecca Franks explores a composer's choral plea for peace, written as the dark cloud of fascism moved ominously over a nervous Europe



The composer

Remarkably, although Ralph Vaughan Williams was in his mid-60s at the time of composing *Dona Nobis Pacem*, five of his nine symphonies were still to come. That said, there was already enough in his portfolio to ensure his place in the pantheon of British composing greats, not least his groundbreaking *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* of 1910 and, four years later, *The Lark Ascending*. His bursting CV also included years spent collecting folksongs and editing *The English Hymnal* in the early part of the 20th century and, away from the sphere of music, serving as a stretcher bearer in World War I.

Building a Library is broadcast on Radio 3 at 3.30pm each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available on BBC Sounds.

The work

The year was 1936, fascism was on the rise and European democracy was under attack. Hitler had marched thousands of German troops into the Rhineland, violating the peace treaty ending the First World War; Spain was torn apart by civil war; while Mussolini had, just the year before, invaded Ethiopia, claiming it for Italy's own. Watching from the relative safety of England, Vaughan Williams was nonetheless aghast about these assaults on freedom and democracy. The composer signed a joint letter to *The Times* expressing belief in these ideals. He readied to raise his voice in his music too.

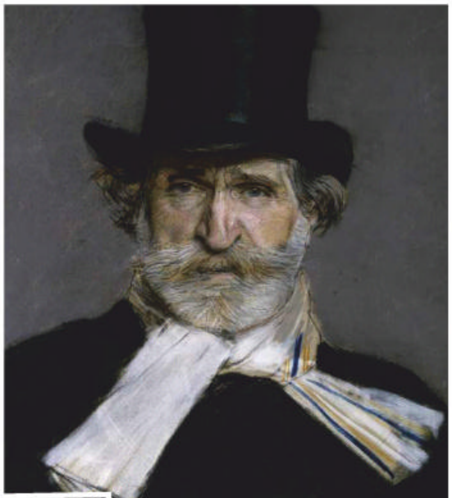
The opportunity arrived in an unlikely form. Vaughan Williams was commissioned by the Huddersfield Choral Society to compose a large-scale piece marking the institution's centenary – surely a celebratory occasion. Instead, he chose trumpets and drums not to offer unbridled optimism and triumph but to serve as a warning for the horrors of war. The dissonant discomfort of his Fourth Symphony (1935) was fresh in his ears, and that musical impulse echoed (not least in the falling semitone figure heard in both pieces) in his new cantata for soprano, baritone choir and orchestra. *Dona Nobis Pacem* was a fervent plea for peace.

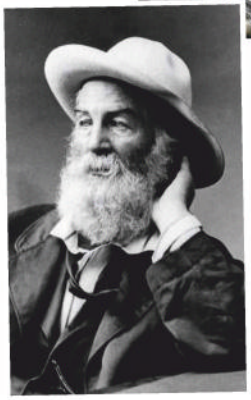
This wasn't just some abstract ideal. It was also personal. Vaughan Williams had served as an ambulance driver in the First World War and seen first hand the trauma of war. He knew its history too, choosing to include words from Liberal MP John Bright's 1855 speech against the Crimean War: 'The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land ... there is no one as of old ... that he may spare and pass on.' With its pacifist spirit and mixture of texts from the Bible, Latin Mass and poetry in English, *Dona Nobis Pacem* pre-echoed Britten's *War Requiem*. And while it hasn't necessarily enjoyed the same symbolic status as the Britten, which rose from the ashes of the bombed Coventry Cathedral, *Dona Nobis Pacem*'s expressive power, vivid writing and timeless message has kept it firmly in the repertoire. It is one of Vaughan Williams's finest choral works.

Vaughan Williams chose trumpets and drums to serve as a warning for the horrors of war

To begin, Vaughan Williams returned to an abandoned standalone piece he'd written in 1911: a setting of the poem *Dirge for Two Veterans*, written by Walt Whitman during the American Civil War and published in his collection *Drum-Taps*. Perhaps there are even earlier seeds. Ursula Vaughan Williams's biography of her husband includes his account of hearing Verdi's Requiem for the first time, as a student. 'At first I was properly shocked by the frank sentimentalism and sensationalism of the music. I remember being particularly horrified at the drop of a semitone on the word "Dona",' he wrote (though the interval is actually a tone). 'But in a very few minutes the music possessed me. [It was] sentimental, theatrical,

Treaty breakers:
German troops march over the Rhine and into Cologne, 1936; (below) Verdi, whose Requiem inspired Vaughan Williams; (bottom) US poet Walt Whitman





occasionally even cheap, and yet was an overpowering masterpiece.'

Unlikely as it seems, Verdi's spirit lingers in *Dona Nobis Pacem*: in its fiery drama and sorrowful laments and, yes, its drop on the word 'Dona'. You can hear that in the opening Agnus Dei, in which the soprano soloist immediately sets out the emotional crux of the piece with her desperate cries for peace, while the choir and orchestra erupt and take us to the edge of an abyss. That plea is ignored and, as the music moves into 'Beat! Beat! Drums!', the murmurs of war are heard. With the orchestra at full tilt, Vaughan Williams vividly sets another Whitman poem, about the obliteration of daily life. Churches, schools, farms: no place, no person is left unscathed by the sweep of war.

The next movement, 'Reconciliation', offers a vision of serenity, a solo violin becoming a voice of freedom, the baritone drawing us into the soldier's ranks. Unsettling realisations are never far away, and one of the most striking moments comes when the baritone sings: 'For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead.' Its sadness and compassion equals that of Britten's setting of Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* in the *War Requiem*.

We then reach the 'Dirge for Two Veterans', with its military march echoes and dark hues: clarinets, bassoons, cellos, basses and violas. 'The Angel of Death' begins in suitably sombre and ominous manner, with the chorus joining as the music searches for consolation and peace. It arrives with words from the Book of Jeremiah, again sung by the baritone: 'O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.' From thereon, Vaughan Williams writes music of radiance and optimism, underlining a message of unity between countries.

After Albert Coates conducted the work's premiere on 2 October 1936 in Huddersfield, *The Times*'s critic wrote: 'Dr Vaughan Williams has never been a composer of the Ivory Tower by profession or practice, and his new work *Dona Nobis Pacem* is a tract for the time. The moral of the work – for its artistic climax is unquestionably a message for today – is the splendour and radiance of peace.'

Turn the page to discover our recommended recordings of VW's Dona Nobis Pacem

GETTY

Tender soloist: baritone Thomas Allen taps into feelings of loss in 'Reconciliation'

Three other great recordings

Richard Hickox (conductor)
Richard Hickox was one of the leading conductors of 20th-century British music, and his 1992 recording of *Dona Nobis Pacem* stands tall, with a luxury line-up of performers including bass-baritone Bryn Terfel (striking, though less inward-looking than some). Hickox's vision of the piece is weighty, signalled immediately by his spacious tempos and Yvonne Kenny's sorrowful soprano in the Agnus Dei. There's often a vividly cinematic quality too, not least when the blazing LSO Chorus and London Symphony Orchestra brass throw us into the tumult of 'Beat! Beat! Drums!'. *(Warner Classics 754 7882)*

Ralph Vaughan Williams (conductor)
In November 1936, Vaughan Williams picked up the baton to record *Dona Nobis Pacem* himself, for the first broadcast performance with the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra as well as the soloists from the Huddersfield premiere the previous month. Of all the available recordings, this is the one most fired up by Verdian drama, fearless conviction and emotional directness, and for that it is unmissable. The recorded sound is, inevitably, historical – but it doesn't

The best recording

A personal journey towards hope

Matthew Best *(conductor)*
Thomas Allen (baritone), Judith Howarth (soprano); Corydon Orchestra, Corydon Singers
Hyperion CDA66655

Some conductors justifiably lean into the public nature and moral stature of Vaughan Williams's anti-war statement, and if that's how you see the work, then Richard Hickox's powerful recording may well be the one for you (see 'Three other great recordings', above right). But Vaughan Williams believed in the individuality of his own artistic voice – listening to Verdi's Requiem had taught him, he said, the importance of the motto 'To thine own self be true'. Personal conviction fuels his *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and that impulse is beautifully captured by Matthew Best and his Corydon Singers and Orchestra in this 1993 recording.

Here, we are taken on a true musical journey, rather like the soul in Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, from fear to hope, from the rumblings of war to the promise of peace. Capturing those seamless transitions is by no means easy – the constant ebb and flow between horror and consolation, violence and serenity – yet Best unfolds it all naturally.

The composer's personal conviction is beautifully captured by Matthew Best

In the opening Agnus Dei, soprano Judith Howarth is a silvery, ethereal presence, less upfront than some soloists, and the contrast between her pleas and the orchestral eruptions immediately sets out the work's essential conflict. The Corydon Singers are far more than the choral backing track offered on some recordings – their united, agile voices are a vital dramatic force in their own right.

Perhaps the recording doesn't offer the orchestral riches of the London Symphony Orchestra in Hickox's version, but there's plenty of ear-catching detail, whether it is the thundering organ or the consolatory solo violin. Baritone Thomas Allen is a first-class soloist, tapping into moving tenderness and a sense of loss in 'Reconciliation' when he meets his enemy. The beauty and perceptiveness of hamper this performance's musical impact. *(Ariadne ARIADNE 5019-2)*

Adrian Boult (conductor)

The London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir have recorded *Dona Nobis Pacem* not once but twice: Adrian Boult conducted it in Kingsway Hall in 1973, while Bryden Thomson did the honours at St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead in 1988. Both are excellent, but perhaps Boult, a close friend of the composer himself, has the edge – and certainly the clearer acoustic – in terms of a coherent philosophy of the piece's architecture and emotional landscape. Baritone John Carol Case's dignity and empathy, combined with his sense of line, also make his contributions notable. *(Warner Classics 574 7822)*

And one to avoid...

Of the 11 available recordings, none is a disaster. All have something to offer. But assuming that time to listen to all of them is at a premium, then perhaps skip the Richmond Symphony's live recording from 2017 (released two years later). Yes, conductor Steven Smith captures the spirit of the cantata, and this is undoubtedly a snapshot of an enjoyable performance, but soprano Michelle Areyzaga takes a while to settle, and the chorus's ensemble could be better.

Vaughan Williams's writing at this point is highlighted: words momentarily fail, wordless instrumental solos take over, and the choir offers balm. After a 'Dirge for Two Veterans' that builds up to a thrilling climax, the chilling arrival of 'The Angel of the Death' and the bleak resignation of the choir are assuaged by Allen, who sings with gravity and compassion.

The turn to jubilation and a stirring vision of nations coming together in peace is also brilliantly managed by Best. Avoiding any suggestion of false hope or twee sentimentalism, his ending feels authentic and genuinely uplifting.

ALAMY, GETTY

Memories of war: Arthur Bliss channelled his own experiences into *Morning Heroes*; (below) Vernon Handley, conductor of a moving Howells *Hymnus Paradisi*

Continue the journey...

We suggest five works to explore after VW's Dona Nobis Pacem

Written a decade before *Dona Nobis Pacem*, **Vaughan Williams**'s *Sancta Civitas* was described by the composer as his favourite of his choral works. Scored for soloists, chorus and orchestra, the piece dramatically sets words from the book of Revelation – in English, despite the Latin title – that express the eventual triumph of good over evil. (**Soloists; Bach Choir, Bournemouth SO/ David Hill** *Naxos 8.572424)*

Hymnus Paradisi expresses grief through restrained choral reflection

Though **Herbert Howells**'s *Hymnus Paradisi* is an exact contemporary of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Howells kept it away from public performance until 1950. Spurred by the death of his son Michael the previous year and including material from his Requiem of 1932, the six-movement work expresses its composer's grief through restrained choral reflection interspersed with large-scale, pain-wracked orchestral outbursts. (**Julie Kennard (soprano) et al; RLPO/Vernon Handley** *Hyperion CDA66488)*

Premiered in 1930, **Arthur Bliss**'s *Morning Heroes* drew on the composer's own experiences in the trenches in World War I, in which his brother Kennard was killed. In this instance much of the text – carefully chosen by Bliss and ranging from Homer to Whitman – is spoken by a narrator to an orchestral accompaniment. (**Samuel West (orator); BBC SO & Chorus/Andrew Davis** *Chandos CHSA 5159)*

At 20 minutes long, *These Things Shall Be* is the most substantial choral work by **John Ireland**, commissioned to write it for a concert to celebrate George VI's coronation in 1937. The utopian words by Victorian poet John Addington Symonds may seem to point to brighter things ahead, but is the sense of hope here really rather distant, or even forlorn? (**Bryn Terfel (bass-baritone); BBC SO & Chorus/Hickox** *Chandos CHAN X10110)*

Gerald Finzi's *Intimations of Immortality* for tenor soloist, chorus and orchestra was a bit of a slow burner, begun in the late-1930s but not completed until shortly before the work's premiere at the 1950 Three Choirs Festival. The words all come from Wordsworth's 1804 *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* and, as that title suggests, have something of a nostalgic feel. (**James Gilchrist (tenor); Bournemouth SO and Chorus/David Hill** *Naxos 8.557863)*

Reviews

Recordings and books rated by expert critics

Welcome

You may be surprised to read that putting these pages together is not an exact science – how can it be, with so many new (and old) recordings sent our way to consider? That said, I do like to think I put at least some thought into how things land, while others are happy accidents. It is no accident that there is a shedload of Shostakovich, from a symphony to three quartets (our Recording of the Month) via a rare song cycle; or indeed a bounty of Bach (which is always a good idea) and a pair of must-listen Mahler symphonies (Paavo Järvi's new Fifth is very special). I have, though, accidentally assembled one of the most global selections possible, with at least 23 countries represented by ensembles and artists from Scotland to Australia, China to Canada. Enjoy the journey.
Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Michael Beek, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Garry Booth, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Claire Jackson, Michael Jameson, Berta Joncus, John-Pierre Joyce, Nicholas Kenyon, Ashutosh Khandekar, Erik Levi, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Freya Parr, Ingrid Pearson, Jeremy Pound, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Charlotte Smith, Jo Talbot, Anne Templer, Sarah Urwin Jones, Kate Wakeling, Alexandra Wilson

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

A real rollercoaster of musical emotions

Erik Levi goes on a thrilling ride thanks to the Jerusalem Quartet's winning survey of three of Shostakovich's mighty quartets

SHOSTAKOVICH
String Quartets Nos 2, 7 & 10
Jerusalem Quartet

Shostakovich

String Quartets
Nos 2, 7 & 10
Jerusalem Quartet
BIS BIS-2654 75:20 mins

This recording is an absolute winner. As in its previous explorations of Shostakovich, primarily on the Harmonia Mundi label, the Jerusalem Quartet provides consummately brilliant playing throughout, combining amazing technical finesse with overwhelming musical insight. The Jerusalems invest every phrase with an exquisite range of nuances, and individual voices are both seamlessly blended and subtly calibrated to achieve a perfect balance of texture. In each performance, the players take us through a vast gamut of emotions, from loneliness and tender reflection to almost unbearable levels of neurosis and unbridled fury. Yet the flawless control that is exhibited throughout never sounds cold or calculating, and even on repeated listening, the playing yields a compelling spontaneity that is normally only experienced live.

The Second Quartet is delivered here with fiercely Beethovenian dynamism. A patient build-up of tension characterises the opening passage of the first movement, the performers slightly holding back the dynamic levels to ensure that the frenzied climax in the development has maximum impact. In stark contrast, time seems to stand still in the ensuing movement. Alexander Pavlovsky simply takes your breath away with his mesmerising projection of the melismatic first violin writing in the *Recitative*, and the tricky transition to the more lyrical central *Romance* is handled with great sensitivity. The clouds darken considerably in the shadowy *Waltz* movement which is invested with a deep sense of unease that

A thrilling encounter: Jerusalem Quartet plays with great technical finesse

is transformed into brutal aggression in the middle part.

Despite Shostakovich's amazingly resourceful and imaginative manipulation of variation form in the finale, I have rarely been convinced that the movement entirely hangs together – a result, perhaps, of the composer's frequent and almost schizophrenic changes of tempo. But I experienced no such qualms in the present performance, which takes the music by the scruff of its neck. Exploiting every twist and turn in the musical narrative with a seemingly infinite variety of textures and dynamics serves to make the full-blooded A minor chords at the end of the work sound all the more tragic and inconsolable.

FELIX BROEDE, YANAI YECHIEL

After the powerful conclusion to the Second Quartet, the Jerusalems adopt a much more subdued, even repressed interpretative pose for the epigrammatic Seventh Quartet, a work dedicated to the memory of the composer's first wife. There are few passages in Shostakovich's quartet output that are more chilling than the disembodied sounds of the second movement *Lento*. It's performed here with such an eerie stillness that I can almost guarantee listeners will be stunned when, almost without warning, the Jerusalems allow all hell to break loose in the unhinged fugal *Allegro*.

> The playing yields a spontaneity that is normally only experienced live

Similarly disturbing juxtapositions of mood characterise the first two movements of the Tenth Quartet. Foreboding underpins the obsessive and claustrophobic *Andante* that here rarely rises above a soft and spookily withdrawn level. Then uncontained anger breaks out in the *Allegretto furioso* where the Jerusalems exert absolute control when playing a dissonant, percussive series of chords whose cumulative impact is intensified by the time we arrive at the very end.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Performer's notes
Ori Kam (viola)

Why did you settle on Quartets Nos 2, 7 & 10 for this album?
It was important for us to put three different quartets together so that there was variety. The 15 quartets span a very wide range emotionally, but also in terms of writing style. When we play the cycle live we do it chronologically, and it always amazes me not just how good the programmes are, but how different they are. For this album we definitely wanted to record No. 2, which is one of our favourites, and we felt the three really complement each other and present a compelling view of Shostakovich's music for quartet.

Nos 2 and 10 were composed 20 years apart – what do they say about Shostakovich?
The feeling is that he has settled into a certain kind of style by No. 10. In the earlier quartets he is experimenting more and he is a little more careful with what he writes. Nos 9 and 10 are kind of the heart of the cycle and then, starting with No. 11, he veers off into something which is very different again.

The Jerusalem Quartet is about celebrate its 30th anniversary. How does that feel?
I've been in the quartet for half of it, but I'm definitely aware of the bond that has been created between my three colleagues. Thirty years is a very long time to do one thing – not that it's all they do, but focusing your life on doing one thing is something that is becoming increasingly rare. And there is an incredible value to it. For me, what is most present in my day-to-day experience playing viola in the quartet is not just the 30-year bond of the players but with audiences as well. I think that is so special and we really experience this on a nightly basis.

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ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

MAHLER
SYMPHONY NO.
5
TONHALLE-ORCHESTER ZÜRICH
PAAVO JÄRVI
α

This full-throttle Mahler 5 sets a fine new benchmark

David Nice says there is none better than this latest recording by Paavo Järvi and his Zurich orchestra

Due care and attention: conductor Paavo Järvi observes Mahler's detail beautifully

KAUPO KIKKAS

Mahler

Symphony No. 5

Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich/Paavo Järvi

Alpha Classics ALPHA1127 71:31 mins

Every time a new recorded Mahler cycle is heralded, you (I) groan about yet another one, but then – in the recent cases of Czech Philharmonic/Bychkov, Minnesota/Vänskä and now Tonhalle Zurich/Paavo Järvi – you're hooked the minute you start listening by the attention to detail, the newly revealed textures, the different sounds. I'll go for broke and say I don't know a better Mahler Fifth than this one, since in addition to Järvi's care over every dynamic, there's a sense of live electric charge which makes the ends of the *Scherzo* and *Finale* above all hair-raisingly brilliant. In the first movement, bassoons especially illuminate perfect balances, strings singing the vocal funeral marches, while in the second Mahler's extravagant counterpoint doesn't feel excessive – this interpretation comes as close as any to making my least favourite storm and stress hold the interest to the end – and there's no better horn *obbligato* in Mahler's central 'world without gravity' than that of Swiss national treasure Ivo Gass; you'll never hear the primeval blasts that bring the dance temporarily to a halt more thrillingly full-throttle.

The *Adagietto* is on the slower side of Mengelberg's famous golden mean, but doesn't feel it; Järvi is a master of flexible movement, so it's always going somewhere. The opening of the *Finale* brings two of the orchestra's best players together, and the fugal romps have alternating delicacy and heft where needed. Natural Tonhalle sound contributes to making this a great Mahler 5, and lucky you if it's your first. Time for me now to catch up on previous Tonhalle/Järvi symphony cycles, which I've somehow missed so far. What a team.

> There's a sense of electric charge which makes it above all hair-raisingly brilliant

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Bacewicz • Lutosławski • Szymanowski

Bacewicz: Overture for Orchestra; **Lutosławski:** Symphony No. 3; **Szymanowski:** Symphonic Fantasy on 'King Roger'

Royal Scottish National Orchestra/
Thomas Søndergård

Linn Records CKD758 59:55 mins

Producer and sound engineer Philip Hobbs is well known for his superb work for Linn Records, but his wizardry is especially welcome in this album of 20th-century Polish music. When the composers paint their notes and harmonies in every colour under the sun, we need to hear every hue and nuance clearly, from the pastoral whisper of a solo flute to the peacock shout of the full ensemble riffing on the 'V for Victory' motto of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The motto's ghostly presence in Bacewicz's Overture of 1943 and the Lutosławski symphony premiered 40 years later forms one link in this satisfying album from Thomas Søndergård and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. But the biggest unifying factor is the collection's heady fusion of nationalist and cosmopolitan influences.

Written during Poland's wartime Occupation, Bacewicz's Overture spends most of its brief time racing defiantly towards victory like a runaway train. A product of Poland's later struggles, Lutosławski's Third Symphony, as fastidiously coloured as music by Ravel, toys with many instrumental niceties before solidifying and driving ahead. Nothing, however, tops the sonic spectacular of the 2024 Symphonic Fantasy stitched together from the opulent music of Szymanowski's opera *King Roger* by the prolific arranger Iain Farrington. From statuesque chords and beckoning cellos to a singing violin and a perfumed *bacchanale*: the tight squeeze of Farrington's cut-and-paste job might not always make narrative sense, but the Fantasy remains excellent and welcome concert hall exotica, most vividly played and recorded.

Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Handel

Water Music; Music for the Royal Fireworks (Water & Fire)

Collegium 1704/Václav Luks

Accent ACC24412 63:23 mins

George Frideric Handel
WATER & FIRE
Collegium 1704
Václav Luks

You might wonder what new effects artists could possibly wring from Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. There are over 60 available recordings of the former, and double that of the latter, among which are many stonking performances. Yet Collegium 1704's reading is so joyous and brashly nonchalant that I felt like I was hearing this music for the first time.

Despite being 41 musicians strong, the band brings bounce and curl to every gesture: ebullience everywhere, all the time. Dance movements bristle with tension between pulse and surface rhythms, giving an electric hum to all movements, whether the mood is gentle for a minuet or bracing for a hornpipe. For the *Water Music*, notably unlike published scores, director Václav Luks follows Handel's order of movements, which was discovered in 2004; this empowers Luks to drastically contrast timbres according to Handel's strategised thinking. The string section's distinctive dusky colours balance the glitter of wind players, whose impishness adds to the party mood. Also important is that this project was conceived as a recording, rather than a concert, which means that acoustic effects could be meticulously mapped out through seating and mic placement.

The production team also merits a shout-out. The wind-heavy mix in both works makes it notoriously tricky to achieve blend and balance, whether in performance or post-production. This recording is not only elegantly mixed and mastered, but at times foregrounds inner voices unheard or muffled in previous recordings. A triumph. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Wynton Marsalis **Blues Symphony**

Detroit Symphony/Jader Bignamini *Pentatone PTC 5187 232 61:26 mins*

WYNTON MARSALIS
BLUES SYMPHONY
Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Jader Bignamini

Though the Blues lies at the heart of this ingenious symphony from 2009, its seven movements cover a much wider spread – marching bands, Latin American dance, Bluegrass and Ragtime are just some of the other glimpses of musical Americana heard along the way, all vibrantly presented here in a gloriously characterful performance. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★★

Molécule **Symphony No. 1**

Orchestre National de Lille/Alexandre Bloch

Alpha Classics ALPHA1082 46:02 mins

This 'Quantum Symphony' by the French electronic artist and DJ is a bit of a conundrum. Based on 'field recordings' of orchestral sounds and concerts, fragmented and reimagined, you might expect a jarringly avant-garde soundscape. Holst's *The Planets* was in the original mix, and maybe a bit of Bernard Herrmann, but the end result is richly cinematic. *Michael Beek* ★★★

New Year's Concert 2025 **Works by J Strauss II et al**

Vienna Philharmonic/Riccardo Muti

Sony Classical 19802875582 96:54 mins (2CD)

NEUJAHRSKONZERT 2025

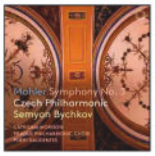
Riccardo Muti's seventh time at the helm of the legendary Vienna New Year's Concert marks the 200th birthday of Johann Strauss II. The chance to indulge in a little escapist nostalgia is certainly welcome in our current times – and classics like the *Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka* and *The Blue Danube* are reliably rousing and romantic. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

Mahler

Symphony No. 3

Catriona Morison (mezzo-soprano); Prague Philharmonic Choir; Czech Philharmonic/Semyon Bychkov

Pentatone PTC 5187 363 101:65 mins (2CD)



The tonal profile of the Czech Philharmonic skews decisively towards the mellow and burnished, and this mainly works well in Mahler's Third Symphony. Conductor Semyon Bychkov leads a patient, empathetic account of the long opening movement, lacking only the raw spit and jagged edges which a partnership like Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic so memorably bring to the table. But in major climaxes Bychkov and his players have a formidable amount of power in reserve, and Pentatone's recording here combines a cossetting warmth with fascinating layers of detail.

The second movement ('What the Flowers in the Meadow Tell Me') has a beguiling charm and sense of delicacy, qualities which translate less well to movement three, where the wind and brass playing occasionally errs on the side of politeness. Walter Hofbauer's post horn solos are, however, wonderfully evocative. Scottish mezzo-soprano Catriona Morison brings a deep-seeking poetry to bear in the 'Midnight Song', while the choirs in movement five make a memorably fresh impression without ever resorting to trumped-up boisterousness.

The long finale is ideally paced by Bychkov, his flowing tempos avoiding the sagginess and near-prostration some conductors succumb to in search of 'profundity'. The Czech Philharmonic plays beautifully throughout, the emotions emerging naturally and with palpable tenderness. The several large climaxes emerge with seamless inevitability, a mark of Bychkov's encompassing interpretive vision. While some Mahlerians may crave a more earthy, elemental approach in places, this performance has class written all over it and makes for a deeply edifying encounter with this great symphony. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mozart

Serenades Nos 7*, 9 & 13; Marches in D major K249 & K335 (Serenata)

*Isabelle Faust (violin), Munich Chamber Orchestra/Enrico Onofri

Harmonia Mundi HMM905396.97 141:11 mins (2CD)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Serenata
Münchener Kammerorchester
Enrico Onofri

Enrico Onofri has included marches which would have grabbed the attention of the people of Salzburg before the serenades, and the first of them certainly does that, with incisive attack, tight rhythms and bright tone. Apart from the brass and timpani, the orchestra consists of modern instruments, but the influence of historically informed performance pervades the music, in not only timbre and phrasing, but also the brisk speeds of the faster movements. The *Allegro con spirito* in the 'Posthorn' Serenade goes at a lick, but the minuets have elegance and poise, if not always consistency of pulse. That's something that also colours the concertante movements: the wind solos are finely balanced, but there's a tendency to linger over cadences, losing direction.

Elegance returns in the second of the K335 Marches, more restrained in pace than its companion, although that doesn't carry across to 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik', whose first movement is almost indecently fast, with cadential distortions impeding the flow. Although the remaining movements are on the fast side, they're not ridiculously so, but ensemble isn't consistently tidy, especially in the finale.

Another stylish march heralds the 'Haffner' Serenade, which has the luxury of Isabelle Faust in the three movements that constitute a mini-concerto. She brings a more organic approach to rubato than Onofri manages elsewhere, but they're not always pulling in the same direction. The rest of the Serenade has the same qualities of textural balance as elsewhere, but also the same rhythmic quirks – a pity. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 11

London Symphony Orchestra/
Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live LSO0888 63 mins

Musical fireworks: Václav Luks and Collegium 1704 make a real splash in Handel

PETRA HAJSKÁ

Three live performances have changed my mind for the better about Shostakovich's most cinematic and, in places, noisiest symphony, all of them at the Barbican: Rostropovich's LSO gamechanger, the National Youth Orchestra singing the revolutionary songs around and between the movements which use them, and a shatteringly focused performance this year by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Jakub Hrůša. I wasn't in the hall for Noseda's interpretation, but it seems to be roughly in the same league, from the muted trumpet solo in frozen Palace Square to the tocsin-warning of history repeating itself at the end. Like Hrůša, Noseda is lithe but never fast, as he sometimes used to be, for the sake of it, and the slow movement based on the poignant lament for the fallen of 1905 is deeply moving, as it should be. The too-precipitate victory salute halfway through the finale which gets wiped out by the percussion is followed by the most poignant of cor anglais solos.

The only problems are the sound, too close-hedging for the strings, and the fact that this is a work which undeniably carries you through all its thrashes better in the concert hall than it does on a recording.
David Nice

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Errollyn Wallen

Orchestral Works
BBC Concert Orchestra/
John Andrews et al
Resonus RES10358 *75:56 mins*

This superb collection feels apt for a composer who has had quite the year – appointed Master of the King's Music and enjoying a remarkable run of premieres. Here, we're treated to an assortment of works composed over 20 years – and they show an artist truly in command of her craft.

In the 12 bubbling movements of *Dances for Orchestra*, we see Wallen's refusal to be part of a set style as vignettes give way to different moods. Moments of darkness are quickly cast aside to frenzied joy. The recording's clarity ensures that every section is heard to full effect. There's lots of drama, but the world Wallen creates never feels out of reach. This is orchestral writing with real gumption, brought to life by the BBC Concert Orchestra's bravado and excitement, culminating in a playful flourish.

From here, we travel through shimmering textures, with Wallen's adept handling of different orchestral colours in her portrayals of paintings. From the joyful miniatures of *Fondant* – a tribute to the majesty of cake – and a brief but poignant solo cello work, we move to more weighty pieces like *Mighty River*, a work commissioned to mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, punctuated with spirituals. A lightness of touch pervades this entire album and shows Wallen's deft handling of an orchestra and all its potential glory.
Freya Parr

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Midsummer Dreams

Beethoven: Symphony No. 8;
Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3
'Scottish'; A Midsummer Night's
Dream – Overture
Australian Romantic & Classical
Orchestra/Rachael Beesley
ARCO ARCOCD-004 *77:01 mins*

The Australian Romantic and Classical Orchestra (ARCO), under leader Rachael Beesley, are a crack Antipodean outfit defined by a rigorous approach to historically informed performance particularly pertaining to the 19th century and its 18th- and 20th-century fringes. Gut strings, expressive bowing and the distinctive sound of historic – or reproduction – strings, wind and brass (including, here, the now rare ophicleide) give their recordings a thoroughly distinctive sound. That quality is emphasised by this live concert recording, which is very much one of individual instruments making up the whole, as if every musician is close-miked.

In the opening *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the strings sound like buzzing fireflies, the soundscape one of liberal portamento, slides and slurs. The effect veers a little disconcertingly towards disunity, perhaps increased by the very individualist recording.

More convincing is the Beethoven Symphony No. 8, its first movement thrillingly building up the sound with great individual timbres, and energetic heft balanced with lightness throughout.

ARCO end with more Mendelssohn, this time the 'Scottish' Symphony, the opening made afresh with distinctive period wind. The sound is by turns tender, deep and rich, with an energy that can be truly exciting; the final movement is full of gutsy drive, superb phrasing and expression, although the portamentos in the preceding *Adagio*, by their nature, tend towards the schmaltzy, which may not appeal to all listeners. Occasionally entries seem imbalanced, but this may also be a result of the recording, which, despite the fascination in hearing the individual instruments, might perhaps have benefited from taking a few steps back from the orchestral maw. *Sarah Urwin Jones*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Poema: Ad Astra

Works by R Strauss, Kelly-Marie Murphy and Kevin Lau
Canada's National Arts Centre
Orchestra/Alexander Shelley
Analekta AN 2 8891 *61:27 mins*

Prevalent chorally, the fashion for commissioning new music that 'responds' to a specific work from the past continues apace; but it's a much rarer phenomenon in orchestral music. Alexander Shelley and his Canadian orchestra however are tireless champions of the new, and their latest project invites responses to the tone poems of Richard Strauss. The first release of a projected four pairs Kelly-Marie Murphy with *Don Juan*, while Kevin Lau grapples with the metaphysical niceties of *Death and Transfiguration*.

Murphy opts to engage not so much with the libidinous Don himself as with events that took place during the work's composition – specifically the painting of Van Gogh's 'The Starry Night', and Williamina Fleming's discovery of the Horsehead nebula. Not that the odd aural nod to Strauss is omitted in a score that opens with pinpoints of light before submitting to the idea of space as an almost unfathomable immensity – all accomplished within a deftly managed tonal language and colourful scoring. Lau reimagines the death-to-transfiguration trajectory as a journey along the Styx to the gates of Hades. It's a journey he approaches with urgency, an open heart and fluent idiom, but the music pales alongside the depths of Strauss's darkness-to-light tone poem. Shelley conducts assured performances of all four works, and the opening of *Don Juan* brims with testosterone before swooning rapture turns to disillusionment and death. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Concerto

CONCERTO CHOICE

A dazzling album debut from Leia Zhu

Christopher Dingle is very impressed by the young violinist's Saint-Saëns survey

Saint-Saëns

Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2 etc

Leia Zhu (violin); ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra/ Howard Griffiths

Berlin Classics 0303539BC 61:23 mins

This is quite a debut. British violinist Leia Zhu may already be a veteran of the concert stage at the ripe old age of 18, but this release, recorded in November 2023, is her first album. Requiring exceptional virtuosity allied to clean musical textures and utmost refinement, Saint-Saëns's works for violin and orchestra are a test for any performer, but Zhu is comfortably up to the challenges they pose.

This initial volume of a projected complete survey features the first two concertos framed by scintillating performances of two of the composer's best-known standalone pieces, the *Introduction et rondo capriccioso* and *Havanaise*. Zhu tears into the First Concerto with relish, unafraid of allowing a bit of rasping grit in the oyster of her otherwise pure, silken tone. At barely 12 minutes long with no break between its three movements, this unusual concerto can be elusive, but Zhu is clearly inside the music, as apparent from her control of the gear changes in the central *Andante espressivo*.

Saint-Saëns actually wrote the Second Violin Concerto before the First. A more conventional, Mendelssohnian work, this charming performance makes the relative rarity of this sparkling work perplexing. Zhu's fingerwork is persistently dazzling, the opening movement's lyrical passages exude an infectious *bonhomie*, while she finds a searching poetry in the slow movement. The glowing textures of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under Howard Griffiths provide a warm bed of support throughout, but the focus is rightly on Zhu's impressive start to her discography.

> Zhu is comfortably up to the challenges posed by these works

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

An incredible start: Leia Zhu displays exceptional virtuosity on her first album

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JS Bach

Keyboard Concertos, BWV 1052-1054 & 1056

Beatrice Rana (piano); Amsterdam Sinfonietta

Warner Classics 2173243363 59:37 mins

Beatrice Rana has carved out a reputation as an interpreter of Romantic and early-20th-century piano music. But JS Bach has always had a strong influence on her playing and career, as evidenced in this album of four keyboard concertos. As Rana points out, although Bach's concertos were written for harpsichord, most of them were reworkings of concertos for other solo instruments. Playing them on a modern grand piano (in this case, a Steinway Model D) therefore gives her the opportunity to personally craft, shape and adapt each one.

There are traces of Romanticism in Rana's handling of the F minor concerto's central *Largo*, and again in the interplay between piano and strings during the D minor concerto's opening *Allegro*. The absence of an indicated tempo marking in the D major work's opening movement also allows Rana to move the pace up a gear and to adopt a style reminiscent of JS Bach's sons, CPE and JC Bach.

The album is not just a one-woman show, however. It was recorded in Hilversum in the Netherlands during a tour with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta in 2022 and is very much a partnership between soloist and orchestra. Led – but not conducted – by violinist Candida Thompson, the Sinfonietta players are particularly adept at interweaving the strings with the piano lines in Bach's contrapuntal passages, especially in the final movements of the E major and F minor concertos. The sound is spacious, but also close-up, highlighting details of a recording that certainly deserves repeated listening.

John-Pierre Joyce

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

JS Bach

Violin Concertos

James Ehnes (violin), Joanna G'froerer (flute), Charles Hamann (oboe); Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra et al

Analekta AN288934 125:33 mins (2CD)

Bach's violin concertos are such a familiar part of the concert repertoire that it is easy to forget the somewhat mirky origins of some of them. The A minor solo concerto and the D minor double concerto come down to us in their original form, the rest, including the famous E major concerto are

ZHUTEK

arrangements or, as the excellent notes to this issue put it, 'reverse engineered' from works in versions for other instruments, usually the harpsichord. In this two-disc release, James Ehnes directs Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra in slightly reduced form, taking the solo parts in four of the concertos and acting as *primus inter pares* in the remaining works where he is joined by soloists from the orchestra.

Ehnes's playing throughout mixes precision with expressive engagement. His unashamed use of vibrato adds undoubted appeal to such movements as the *Adagio* from the E major solo concerto, but overall, many will find the approach on the old-fashioned side. This is clearest in the triple concerto where the solo harpsichord is not prominent enough and the orchestral pointing at times almost romantic. The disjunction between the elegance of Ehnes's playing and the rather leaden orchestral accompaniment, notably in the slow movements of the A minor solo and the D minor double concertos, is rather enervating and in faster movements the pointing of the bass lines often lacks nuance. There are good things here, particularly in the soloists' playing, but all in all the results are less than satisfying. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Michael Daugherty

Blue Electra*; Last Dance at the Surf; To The New World**

*Anne Akiko Meyers (violin), **Elissa Johnston (soprano); Albany Symphony/David Alan Miller
Naxos 8.559955 61:54 mins

AMERICAN CLASSICS
MICHAEL DAUGHERTY
Blue Electra

This new release from Grammy-winning American composer Michael Daugherty showcases three warmly evocative recent works, each exploring ideas of flight.

Smartly performed by the Albany Symphony and Anne Akiko Meyers, *Blue Electra* is a concerto for violin and orchestra, inspired by pioneering aviator Amelia Earhart who vanished over the Pacific during her bid to become the first woman to fly around the world. Each movement of the concerto explores a different year in Earhart's life, with the sweeping sonic panorama of the opening sparked by Earhart's 1928 poem 'Courage', written just before she embarked on her first transatlantic flight. 'Paris (1932)' is a joyful dash through Earhart's time frequenting jazz soirées, which finds Meyers on particularly dazzling form in the *moto perpetuo* score. 'Last Flight (1937)' offers an especially affecting depiction of Earhart's plane losing radio contact, using strident repeated sonorities in the violin to capture a deft mix of horror and triumph at the work's close.

Happier circumstances are relayed in *To the New World* for orchestra which charts the progress of Apollo 11, from launch day trepidation to victorious return. The second movement is notably effective in its clever rhythmic repurposing of Armstrong's 'One Small Step' speech, splendidly sung here by soprano Elissa Johnston.

The album is completed by *Last Dance at the Surf*, a single-movement work that is part celebration, part elegy, written to commemorate Iowa's Surf Ballroom – the iconic venue that hosted Buddy Holly and friends the evening their plane then crashed.

This well-performed album is both moving and uplifting, and aptly showcases Daugherty's imaginative approach to musical storytelling. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Gipps

Symphony No. 5; Violin Concerto*; Leviathan**

*Charlie Lovell-Jones (violin); **Bill Anderson (bassoon); BBC Philharmonic/Rumon Gamba
Chandos CHAN20319 69:32 mins

CHANDOS
RUTH GIPPS

'Why no 5th?' That was the forthright message Ruth Gipps put into the press, via classified advertisements, after the BBC rejected her Fifth Symphony of 1982 for broadcast. It's one of several fascinating details revealed by Lewis Foreman in his illuminating booklet essay, another being that the enterprising Gipps – who poured considerable energy into creating her own ensembles and creating opportunities for musicians – programmed Florence Price's Piano Concerto in D minor in 1988, long

A way with Bach: pianist Beatrice Rana has long been inspired by the composer

before the current mainstream 'rediscovery' of Price's music.

So, what to make of the Fifth now that Gipps is having her own moment in the sun? If being cutting edge was criteria for broadcast in the 1980s, then this piece certainly fails the test. Completed in 1982 and dedicated 'by permission' to William Walton, the symphony's style and tonal language was out of kilter with the world around her. (John Tavener's *The Lamb*, John Adams's *Grand Pianola Music* and Arvo Pärt's *Passio* are all from the same year.) But cast aside that burden, and there's a worthwhile symphony to explore here. Cast in four movements, it ends, rather unusually, with a wordless 'Missa Brevis', with each part of the mass labelled in the score. The BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Rumon Gamba, easily tap into the music's vigour, colour and lyricism.

Equally unusual is *Leviathan*, Op. 59, a striking essay for contrabassoon and orchestra, and more memorable than the early Violin Concerto, written when Gipps was in her early twenties for her older brother, Bryan. Yet, however assured the writing and however sympathetic soloist Charlie Lovell-Jones's playing, the piece feels more like a homage to pastoral Vaughan Williams (one of her teachers) than distinctive Gipps. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mozart

Piano Concertos Nos 9 'Jeunehomme' & 12

Elizabeth Sombart (piano); Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/ Pierre Vallet
Rubicon RCD1192 63:02 mins

MOZART
9 & 12
ELIZABETH SOMBART

Elizabeth Sombart's discography includes the complete piano concertos of Beethoven and Chopin, while her previous Rubicon accounts of concertos 20, 21, 23 and 27 showed her to be a capable but modest Mozartian. Here, she assays two of Mozart's finest middle-period concertos, again yielding self-effacing and unremarkable performances of both.

Concerto No. 9 in E flat, K271, the so-called 'Jeunehomme' concerto of 1777, broke new ground for the genre, and is notable as much for its extended scope as for its intimacy and thematic richness – as the American musicologist Michael Steinberg suggests, 'This is the concerto in which Mozart became Mozart.'

Sombart's playing can't match the spontaneity of incident and fluidity of phrasing attending Murray Perahia's Sony version with the ECO, much less of Alfred Brendel's unparalleled Philips recording with Marriner and the ASMF. That's most apparent in the rapturously beautiful *Andantino* (one of the loveliest in any Mozart concerto), made disconcertingly ponderous here under Pierre Vallet's unbending direction. Even the enticingly inventive closing *Rondeau* seems laboriously four-square and episodic, and with a total duration of almost 33 minutes, this account never really takes flight.

Elizabeth Sombart's traversal of the little A major Piano Concerto, K414, might have hummed along joyously on another day, but this, too, is another drably predictable affair, lacking the flair and vitality that this music ideally needs. As alternatives, Brendel and Perahia remain obvious prime contenders, though for a historically informed take on both concertos (and one which avoids a multi-disc purchase) consider Ronald Brautigam's insightful and invigorating pairing on BIS. *Michael Jameson*

PERFORMANCES ★★
RECORDING ★★★

Ravel

Piano Concertos

Seong-Jin Cho (piano); Boston Symphony Orchestra/
Andris Nelsons
DG 486 6820 40:19 mins

Ravel was never happier than when problem solving – and writing a piano concerto for the left hand alone brought out the best in him. To up the ante he composed a concerto for two hands in tandem that could not be more different. For whereas the D major is initially saturnine, even menacing, opening as if sprinting over shards of broken glass, the G major is where the jazz age meets the 18th century. And if Seong-Jin Cho's postscript to his recent release of Ravel's complete solo piano music is something of a mixed bag, it's a valiant effort in reconciling opposites.

The orchestral introduction to the D major Concerto isn't quite edgy enough. And the piano's arresting flourish over, Cho sounds a little matter of fact (the orchestra's response also unexpectedly buttoned up). The piano's *più lento* however is translucently limpid, and Andris Nelsons keeps a tight control over the protean central section.

The G major Concerto on the other hand starts well but the flow becomes compromised, at times self-conscious – though not without disclosing piquant detailing as well as ravishingly pellucid textures and a snappily vibrant close. In the slow movement, a nocturne masquerading as a waltz (or is it the other way round?), a few of Cho's decisions undermine Ravel's requisite simplicity, but the iridescent trills at the end dissolve magically, while the finale positively sizzles. Martha Argerich, Krystian Zimerman and Cédric Tiberghien (with the fruity period instruments of Les Siècles) are perhaps more consistently satisfying, but Cho is not without some fresh insights that reward an open mind. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Vivaldi

The Four Seasons and Other Concertos (Vivaldi 8, Vol. 1)

Adrian Chandler (violin);
La Serenissima
Signum Classics SIGCD886 83:07 mins

Surely not another version of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*? Wait. Be prepared to be enthralled by the energy and audacity of this version. We are so inculcated with *The Four Seasons* as wallpaper music that it takes a performance such as this one to make us listen afresh and revel in the extraordinarily modern outlook of a Baroque rollercoaster. Undoubtedly, the springboard for such an inspirational recording comes from the already highly charged Italian performance traditions of Il Giardino Armonico or Europa Galante. But there's an added frisson of electricity here. Adrian Chandler and La Serenissima are much more daring, theatrical and spontaneous in their approach to tempo and are perfectly prepared to apply rubato where they see fit. A good example comes in the first movement of 'Autumn' where they conjure up great rusticity, perhaps emulating the sound of a hurdy gurdy. But half-way through, we grind to a halt and then wind up again to foot-tapping rhythms.

Colours and articulation are also varied, the strings delivering a crisp rhythmically pungent accompaniment. Yet at other moments there are moments of repose, at least for a second, before the first *Allegro* propels you irresistibly forward. Ornamentation is expressive, and the continuo band of theorbo, Baroque guitar, archlute, harpsichord and organ yields a rich, semi-percussive timbre.

Underlying Chandler's interpretation is a belief that classic texts and allegories underpin Vivaldi's music – and he generates a musical word painting in this light. Thus 'La Tempesta di Mare' delves into the furies of the elements whereas 'Il Piacere' might serve as a lesson to the party-going Venetian crowds. The other seasonal images of birds chirping and dogs howling are well known but vividly created here in a totally believable Baroque soundworld. *Jo Talbot*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Milestones

Works by Price, Lera Auerbach, Lora Kvint and Errollyn Wallen

Philippe Quint (violin); Royal Scottish National Orchestra/
Andrew Litton (piano)
Pentatone PTC 5187 408 62:27 mins

The title needs to be taken with a pinch of salt: the works that the Russian-born American violinist Philippe Quint plays with such passion and force on his 1708 Antonio Stradivari are pieces written directly for him, each of them marking significant moments in his life and career. They wouldn't, however, necessarily be considered milestones in the wider world.

I certainly wouldn't bestow the label upon Lera Auerbach's Violin Concerto No. 1 of 2003, though a chutzpah prize might be possible for creating such an unfriendly and cacophonous piece, sometimes resembling early Prokofiev mixed with heavy metal. The music's lowering effect is enhanced by a brash recording acoustic that adds a shrill gleam to Quint's violin while leaving the quainter creatures in

BRIEF NOTES

Brahms • Suk Works for Violin and Orchestra

Liza Ferschtman (violin); Brussels Philharmonic/Elias Grandy
Rubicon RCD1120 63:56 mins

This attractive pairing showcases some quality fiddle playing from Ferschtman, who is darkly viola-like on her lower strings, yet sweetly fragile at the top of the fingerboard. There's a steely strength underlying the difficult Brahms passagework. But it's the Suk *Fantasy* that really sees her take flight, with a delightfully improvisatory quality. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

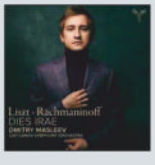
Rózsa Sinfonia concertante; Notturno ungherese; Rhapsody

Nikita Boriso-Glebsky (violin), Harriet Krijgh (cello); Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz/Gregor Bühl
Capriccio C5535 56:37 mins

Rózsa's lengthy Sinfonia concertante, written for Piatigorsky and Heifetz, is resurrected brilliantly here, alongside a 1970s *Notturno* and a very early *Rhapsody*. His hallmarks: grandiosity, passion and hauntingly reverential, pastoral melodies are here in spades, especially in the latter two works, with thrilling performances to match. *Michael Beek* ★★★★

Dies Irae Works by Liszt, Marcello and Rachmaninov

Dmitry Masleev (piano); Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra
Aparté AP384 56 mins



Whether stated bluntly at the outset of Liszt's rowdy *Totentanz* or introduced more subtly within Rachmaninov's much-loved *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, the 'Dies Irae' chant is the thread running through this appealing programme. Pianist Dmitry Masleev is more powerful than songful, perhaps, but the interplay with the orchestra is spot-on and the closing, calming solo Bach is sublime. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★

LIA VITTONE PHOTOGRAPHY

A daring approach: La Serenissima deliver a spontaneous *Four Seasons*

Auerbach's fussy instrumentarium – the flexitone, the musical saw – relatively untouched.

Everything after this is an improvement. Errollyn Wallen's recent Violin Concerto, distantly inspired by Quint's Russian childhood and American emigration, is eclectic, fidgety and unfocused, but if you don't like one minute you may very well like the next. The most straightforward and successful offering comes from the violinist's mother, Lora Kvint, whose *Odyssey Rhapsody* squeezes Odysseus, Penelope and the Trojan War into nine dramatic minutes for her son's violin and Andrew Litton's piano. Conducting, Litton's gusto helps the RSNO survive Auerbach and happily glide through Wallen and Florence Price's *Adoration*, the touchingly simple encore. As for Quint, who throws himself into his work, body and soul, let's hope for sturdier milestones next time.

Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★

SHIFT

Works by Simon Dobson, Arthur Pryor, Philip Sparke et al

Peter Moore (trombone); Tredegar Band/Ian Porthouse

Chandos CHSA5366 66:38 mins

This latest project from virtuoso trombonist Peter Moore, coupled with the Tredegar Band, puts together two hugely successful and highly respected representatives from the brass world. Moore – who first came to prominence as the youngest ever winner of the BBC Young Musician Competition – evidently thrives on the energy given off by this ensemble. Tredegar Band seem equally at home with their soloist, who grew up in the brass band world.

The programming works quite beautifully, with Moore's impressive range and quality of sound exemplifying the best of solo trombone playing. Particular areas of joy are in Gordon Langford's *Rhapsody*, Philip Sparke's *Sambezi* and the Spiritual *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*. Meanwhile, Simon Dobson's outstanding composition *Shift* displays exciting ideas reminiscent of Thomas Adès in rhythmic drive, audacity in orchestration and thrilling ensemble dovetailing. Sounds from this work are conjured from an expansive, more cosmic world than the listener may be familiar with.

Expectations are not matched, however, by the quality of the recording, which lacks clarity, over-resonated and – despite the sentimentality of some of the phrasing in the performances – couldn't be simply written off as 'old fashioned' in its production. At times, basses and inner parts are poorly balanced with the soloist, and the quality of sound on the percussion instruments is sadly blurred by an acoustic reminiscent of a school gymnasium.

Anne Templer

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★

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Opera & Stage

OPERA CHOICE

A memorable and moving *Arabella*

David Nice is highly enthralled by this Berlin staging of Strauss's colourful opera

R Strauss

Arabella

Sara Jakubiak, Elena Tsallagova et al; Orchestra and Chorus of the Deutsche Oper Berlin/Donald Runnicles; dir. Tobias Kratzer (Berlin 2023)

Naxos DVD: 2.110774; Blu-ray: NBD0182V 160 mins

Tobias Kratzer's Berlin *Arabella*, part of a Strauss triptych, has made me think long and hard about the paradoxes and contrary pulls of the composer and his 'house poet' Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and it ends up deeply moving, too. We start in 1860s Vienna and the impecunious Waldners living beyond their means. Camera operators stalk the split stage, sometimes projecting black-and-white period detail: an irritant, though the singing-acting of the cast is excellent.

Act 2 enthrals: for Strauss's messy Viennese carnival ball, composed after the writer's death, Kratzer shows a corridor outside the dance-hall as time tunnel, moving through 1920s Austria, with Nazis briefly arresting members of a cabaret troupe, and to the '60s and eventually the present day. It's a good metaphor for our determined heroine transcending social restraints and toxic masculinity which aren't resolved until halfway through an equally perceptively staged third act.

Sara Jakubiak is more a dramatic than lyric soprano, but phrases gloriously; she's well matched with Russell Braun's ardent baritone as a Mr Right from a far Austrian province who learns through suffering. Elena Tsallagova pulses with emotion, too, as the cross-dressing sister; only Robert Watson's pushy and unstable Matteo acts less well than he sings. The momentum is brilliantly maintained by Donald Runnicles, with no lingering for the set pieces. The final action is a funny, touching water fight. Let's have the other two operas on DVD too, please.

> The momentum is brilliantly maintained by Donald Runnicles

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★

Giving life to Mr Right: Russell Braun (here with Hye-Young Moon) is an ardent baritone

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Brian

***Agamemnon; Symphonies Nos 6 'Sinfonia tragica' and 12**

Eleanor Dennis (soprano), Stephanie Wake-Edwards (mezzo-soprano), John Findon (tenor), Robert Murray (tenor), Clive Bayley (bass); English National Opera Orchestra and Chorus/Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion CDA68464 66:24 mins

Havergal Brian was in his eighties when he wrote *Agamemnon* and soon to experience a starburst of late creativity, composing 21 symphonies before his 93rd birthday!

If anyone can convince us of the worth of this one-act drama of Aeschylus's tragedy of Agamemnon's last bloody bath it's Martyn Brabbins, a doughty champion of Brian's music. Yet even he cannot rescue a libretto borrowed from JS Blackie's impenetrable high Victorian translation of *Aeschylus*, and the declamatory style that Brian chooses for his singers with the high tessitura for both the Watchman and Agamemnon further muddying our understanding. All credit to the tenors John Findon and Robert Murray for finding a way through. And if Eleanor Dennis is an icy voiced Clytemnestra, Stephanie Wake-Edwards makes for a touching Cassandra.

The music is another matter and played with complete conviction by the English National Opera Orchestra. Brian was an English late Romantic with half an ear on Mahler and Bruckner, but with none of their spaciousness, preferring his own epigrammatic idiosyncrasies – melodic fragments that in *Agamemnon* and both the symphonies recorded here arrive and disappear.

He writes a brutal march for Agamemnon and the returning Greeks, mixes harp and woodwinds in an unusual manner with rattling snare drums creating a sense of menace. And there's something magical about his use of the cor anglais in the slow movement of the Sixth Symphony and the tam tam at the end of the 12th. Here is a unique soundworld where ignorant armies clash by night.

Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Mozart

The Magic Flute

Manuel Walser, Angelo Pollak, Ruth Williams, Pauline Texier, Bastian Kohl, Solveig Bergersen et al; Orkester Nord/Martin Wåhlberg

Aparté AP367 169 mins (3CD)

What's not to enjoy about this new *Die Zauberflöte*? Recorded on original instruments by the admirable

Simon (Boccanegra) says: Argentinean baritone Germán Enrique Alcántara is exceptional as Verdi's lead

Scandinavian ensemble Orkester Nord, their director Martin Wåhlberg has thought about the performance traditions that pertained in Vienna in 1791, and as such we are given the complete spoken dialogue.

However, there's a price to be paid for such historical fidelity. While we don't know what musicians were in the pit at the Theater auf der Wieden for the first performances, there is evidence from a later production with the ratio between strings and woodwind favouring the latter. This often produces an uncomfortable sound palette with basses to the fore in the balance. Then there is the pianoforte – historically accurate but often intrusive.

As for the dialogue, performed against a background of extraneous noises, it is 'read' rather than 'acted' by the cast, with little sense of characterisation.

The performers are a mixed bunch. Bastian Kohl is a noble baritonal Sarastro with sudden leaps into a gravelly bottom register, Pauline Texier is a harpie-like Queen of the Night with a coloratura that's all in place and admirable diction. Angelo Pollack is a decent Tamino, though a shade pedestrian, while his Papageno Manuel Walser produces some curious ornaments in 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen'. So we arrive at Ruth Williams's Pamina; at 18, just one year older than Anna Gottlieb who created the role, the voice is pure and sweet but in neither of her great arias do you hear despair or joy. This is a *Flute* searching for magic.

Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Puccini

Tosca

Eleonora Buratto, Jonathan Tetelman, Ludovic Tézier, Giorgi Manoshvili, Matteo Macchioni, Davide Giangregorio, Nicolò Ceriani, Costantino Finucci, Alice Fiorelli; Orchestra, Coro e Voci Bianche dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia/Daniel Harding

DG 486 6997 106:21 mins (2CD)

PUCCINI · TOSCA

This album captures a concert performance of *Tosca* given last year to mark the debut of Daniel Harding at the helm of the Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia: a fitting choice of work for his move to Rome. The Italian soprano Eleonora Buratto, who has sung Tosca just once before in Munich, emerges from this recording as an ideal interpreter of the title role, her voice full-bodied but never strident, eminently suited to both the dramatic and lyrical demands of the music. We must hope she will be booked for *Toscas* elsewhere soon.

Ludovic Tézier, a seasoned Scarpia, is superlative, knowing exactly when to bring a coarseness, even a bark, to the villain's voice at moments of high drama. The interactions between the pair are so quintessentially theatrical that we can smell the greasepaint and the dry ice. Elsewhere, we are more aware of listening to a concert. The tenor Jonathan Tetelman, whose recital albums I have reviewed positively in these pages in the past, offers a radiant, heartfelt 'E lucevan le stelle', showcasing excellent vocal control and emanating palpable distress at the end, but is hampered slightly in the opera's first scene by orchestral tempos that are consistently too slow. Harding is adept at handling moments where purely orchestral music comes to the fore (the sombre conclusion to Act Two; the evocative opening to Act Three) and coaxes great sincerity from the players, but a bit more zing and zip would have been welcome in this otherwise excellent interpretation. *Alexandra Wilson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Verdi

Simon Boccanegra (1857 version)

Germán Enrique Alcántara, Eri Nakamura, William Thomas, Iván Ayón-Rivas, Sergio Vitale, David Shipley, Beth Moxon; RNCM Opera Chorus; Chorus of Opera North; The Hallé/Mark Elder

Opera Rara ORC65 133:23 mins (2CD)

VERDI
Simon Boccanegra
1857

At its premiere in Venice in 1857, *Simon Boccanegra* was received with relative indifference – a reaction that continued during its limited circulation over the next decade or two.

Partly on the advice of his publisher Ricordi, Verdi decided to make substantial revisions to the opera, working with a new librettist, Arrigo Boito (Francesco Piave, who wrote the original text, died in 1876); the result, premiered at La Scala in 1881, proved far more successful, and slowly but surely entered the international repertoire. Today it is regarded as one of the composer's finest achievements.

This major revision has effectively put the original 1857 version into the shade, but in his booklet notes to this Opera Rara release, leading Verdi authority Roger Parker argues for the merits of the first version of the score, which he has recently edited and which has now been recorded with Mark Elder, one of today's leading Verdi exponents in charge of the Hallé (of which he is now conductor emeritus) together with the Chorus of Opera North and RNCM Opera Chorus.

The second version includes a major new finale to Act 1 – the so-called Council Chamber scene – plus numerous changes large and small throughout. For many, Verdi's final thoughts will continue to prove more persuasive, but completists will at least want to become acquainted with the 1857 edition. In any case, it's interesting to see how Verdi 'improved' what was already a mature score in ways large and small throughout its substantial structure. Listeners will be able to make up their minds as to which they prefer.

Exceptional vocal performances from Argentinean baritone Germán Enrique Alcántara in the title role, rising bass William Thomas as his foe Jacopo Fiesco and Peruvian tenor Iván Ayón-Rivas as his enemy turned supporter, Gabriele Adorno; Japanese soprano Eri Nakamura is less consistent as Boccanegra's long-lost daughter, Maria.

George Hall

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

THOMAS AURIN, PALI ALVAREZ

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

signum
ATTENDE DOMINE
Music for Lent & Passiontide
The Bevan Family Consort

A glorious Easter selection from the brilliant Bevans

Alexandra Wilson finds much to enjoy in this family album of beautiful music for Lent and Passiontide

A spring in their step: The Bevans are faultless in their approach to this varied programme

Attende domine

– Music for Lent & Passiontide

Works by Byrd, Mendelssohn, Poulenc et al

The Bevan Family Consort

Signum Classics SIGCD892 69:18 mins

The latest offering from the Bevan Family Consort is an album of varied choral works composed for Lent and Passiontide. These are singers whose childhoods were steeped in Catholic church music, and many pieces featured have personal significance to them, not least a dramatic, unsettling setting of Psalm 21 by David Bevan (father to several performers, uncle to others) and a Good Friday piece called *The Reproaches* by Colin Mawby, choir director at Westminster Cathedral and a family friend. Some of the pieces are recorded here for the first time: not only newer works, but also extraordinary, long-forgotten ones by the Renaissance composers Girolamo Giacobbi, Andrea Rota and Alfonso Ferrabosco, all of them rediscovered and edited by one of the singers, early music editor Francis Bevan.

Though the Consort brings together acclaimed international opera singers with cousins or siblings for whom singing is merely a hobby, the ensemble is consistently faultless: attention to blend and diction are strikingly precise. By definition, the mood of the album is solemn, but variety is provided not only in the different ages and styles of the works, but in the approach taken to them. Earlier music is sung with a crystalline tone, each choral line sounding as a single voice. ('Christus factus est' is particularly evocative of the purest sense of peace.) Elsewhere, a far more sumptuous, expressive tone is adopted for numbers by Duruflé, Poulenc, Mendelssohn and Bonis. Scholarly, devout and sung with the sincerest commitment, this album is a passionate project indeed.

> This is scholarly, devout and sung with the sincerest commitment

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

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Beethoven

King Stephen; The Ruins of Athens; Leonore Prohaska

Accentus; Insula Orchestra/ Laurence Equilbey

Erato 2173253694 (digital) 44:05 mins

Beethoven's music for the stage is still comparatively under-represented on recordings. Keen-eared listeners will know some of the overtures and incidental fragments, at least, though *Leonore Prohaska* will probably be unknown to most. What better way, then, to bring this music before a wider audience than to use it as the soundtrack to an immersive multi-media 'space opera', with Manga (a very popular form of Japanese comic-book illustration) images projected onto a vast curved screen?

According to the conductor Laurence Equilbey 'the philosophy of Manga is informed by utopianism, heroism and humanism… these values were close to Beethoven's heart and are present in his music.' All well and good, but re-ordering of movements from three entirely unrelated works (this release follows the track listing of the 'Beethoven Wars' presentation itself) to suit a purpose which would have been wholly unfathomable to Beethoven diminishes the dramatic effect of each, and makes for a confusing listening experience, too.

However, for those prepared to accept the challenge, the musical rewards here are considerable. These engrossing and authoritative performances are thrillingly played by the Insula Orchestra, with excellent vocal and instrumental contributions from a fine team of soloists.

As a footnote, Beethoven's *Leonore Prohaska*, WoO96, memorialises the virtuous heroine of Johann Dunker's play about Potsdam's 'Joan of Arc'. Its Funeral March will be immediately recognisable, if you've watched British State Funerals on TV, from its arrangement for military band, and there's probably no better way of getting to know the rest than by hearing this intriguing Erato issue. Recommended. *Michael Jameson*

PERFORMANCES ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

Liszt

Via Crucis*; Consolations; Harmonies poétiques et religieuses

Leif Ove Andsnes (piano); *Norwegian Soloists Choir/ Grete Pedersen

Sony Classical 19802856672 62:20 mins

Go into any Roman Catholic church, and around the walls will be depicted in some form the 14 Stations of the Cross, depicting the journey of Christ from his condemnation to his crucifixion and death. The sequence has inspired musical reflections, but surely none stranger and more enigmatic than Franz Liszt's late work for choir and piano (or organ), arising from his late spirituality and begun in Rome in 1866.

Its deliberately discontinuous, awkwardly juxtaposed settings begin to broach the atonal style of his late works, which are often elusive, but there is also a use of plainsong hymns (the 'Vexilla regis' begins the work), strident piano unisons and eloquent interventions from a tenor Jesus (Øystein Stenshelm), bass-baritone Pilate (Olle Holmgren) and the mezzo-soprano Mari Askvik.

Choral singing is well-focused from the Norwegian Soloists' Choir under Grete Pedersen, and the difficult acoustic balance is well judged; but the chief attention here is on Andsnes's idiomatic, almost gruff piano playing, forever dragging us on to the next painful landmark in the Passion story. As if to compensate, Andsnes then adds the six *Consolations* S.172, exquisitely done, especially the flowing fourth in D flat, then two well-chosen pieces from the S.173 *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, closing the album with the amazing quasi-improvisation on Palestrina, *Miserere*.

Musically this is a most successful revival of a neglected piece, and there is a good note by Malcolm Hayes, but it is astonishing that Sony has not provided, even online, texts and translations of the sung parts which will be unfamiliar to even the most ardent Roman Catholic; that deserves a severe act of penance. *Nicholas Kenyon*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Shostakovich

Suite on Verses of Michelangelo; October

Matthias Goerne (baritone); Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France/Mikko Franck

Alpha Classics ALPHA1121 52:50 mins

MATTHIAS GOERNE
SHOSTA-KOVICH
MICHEL-ANGELO

Composed near the end of his life, Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses by Michelangelo* is a deeply affecting work, the eleven songs in the cycle encapsulating universal issues such as love, creativity, death and artistic destiny. Although Shostakovich's language is austere and spare in texture, the ideas are sharply defined with sufficiently varied juxtapositions of mood throughout.

Matthias Goerne has already given us a fine and sensitively sung recording of the Michelangelo settings in its original version for voice and piano. Needless to say, performing the work with orchestra creates different challenges for the interpreters that are not entirely realised here. Goerne's warm, lyrical baritone sounds most convincing in gently reflective songs such as 'Morning' and 'Love', and the wonderfully fluid inflexion of vocal line in 'Separation', matched by subtle changes of colour in the string chords, is hauntingly beautiful. I'm far less persuaded, however, by the interpretations of 'Anger' and 'Creativity' which require more dramatic heft and physical impact from both singer and orchestra, qualities that are projected with much greater visceral intensity in the rival Chandos recording featuring Ildar Abdrazakov with the BBC Philharmonic under Gianandrea Noseda.

By a curious coincidence, the more generously filled Noseda recording also includes the rarely heard symphonic poem *October* as an unlikely coupling. This work, whose bombastic soundworld recalls the opening movement of the Twelfth Symphony, seems as far removed as possible from the profundities of the *Michelangelo Suite*. Although Mikko Franck and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France perform it with energy and enthusiasm, their efforts fail to persuade me that its current neglect is unjustified. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Getting animated: Laurence Equilbey brings Beethoven to the big screen

G Williams

Missa Cambrensis

April Fredrick, Angharad Lyddon et al; Côr Heol y March; BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales/ Adrian Partington

Lyrita SRCD442 66:41 mins

GRACE WILLIAMS
MISSA CAMBRENSIS

Like Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Grace Williams's *Missa Cambrensis* (Mass of Wales) seems more a strenuously exploratory search for spiritual answers than a confident articulation of pre-considered certitudes. The opening Kyrie, for example, is laced with drifting, ungrounded chromaticism, where it's difficult for the choir to accurately nail the intervals. The BBC National Chorus of Wales does so confidently, and brings a spirited attack to the succeeding Gloria, whose basic vaulting enthusiasm is partially de-energised by a fractured rhythmic pattern.

Questing, extended melismata mark the writing for the assertive soloists in the Laudamus te, while the Gloria's concluding 'Amens', though not unconvincing, have a slightly fevered air about them.

The Credo's opening recalls, in its ritualistic gestures and orchestration, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Williams herself explained that she did not feel the Credo 'as the usual downright affirmation', rather as 'the most mystical thing of all'. That comes across powerfully in conductor Adrian Partington's well-paced, carefully sifted account, and of the work as a whole. A Welsh-language carol, sung limpidly by the children's choir Côr Heol y March, is interpolated at one point, and Rowan Williams brings a reassuring gravitas to his narration (in Welsh) of the Beatitudes.

The *Missa Cambrensis* comes from relatively late in Williams's career (1971), and is a striking and imposing composition. Anyone interested in her music, or British choral music in general, should certainly hear it. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

George

Songs etc by Chopin, Liszt, Offenbach, Viardot et al

Sonya Yoncheva (soprano), Olga Zado (piano) et al

Naïve V8616 47:29 mins

GEORGE
SONYA YONCHEVA

Many of Chopin's biographers (most of them men) give short shrift to George Sand when it comes to the story of her relationship with the composer. Their decade-long partnership (1837-47) was unconventional – indeed almost everything about Sand was – but her place as one of the most successful 19th-century writers has been played down for too long and reassessments are finally underway. This welcome album is the outcome of Sonya Yoncheva's fascination with Sand, and feels like a labour of love.

MARK PICKTHALL, JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT

Sand also loved several prominent artists in addition to Chopin. One notable relationship was with the dramatist Alfred de Musset during the years 1833-35, and she seems to have cast her spell over Liszt and was close to Pauline Viardot, both featured here. Good though it is to hear some of Sand's own words (spoken by Yoncheva herself), the love sounds sentimental when accompanied by background piano music. Better to have included musical settings of Sand – not least from the opera *Théophile Semet* composed on *La Petite Fadette*, with Sand acting as her own librettist.

This tribute to a goddess opens with 'Casta diva' in a piano arrangement erroneously attributed to Chopin. The pianist Olga Zado also contributes modest performances of Chopin and Liszt, but Yoncheva's singing is more distinctive – she brings sultry tone to Delibes's 'Les Filles de Cadix', among several settings of Musset. His appeal to Leoncavallo, Tosti and Offenbach is an interesting feature of this album, but the musical highlight is Yoncheva's singing of 'Faible coeur!', one of Viardot's Chopin mazurka arrangements. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Masabane Cecilia

Songs and arias by Berlioz, Gershwin, R Strauss et al
Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha (soprano), Aron Goldin (piano)
Rubicon RCD1180 59:36 mins

MASABANE
CECILIA
ARON GOLDIN

This portrait of the South African soprano ranges widely. From her own country come traditional and art songs, plus from elsewhere lieder, French *mélodie*, operatic extracts and songs from the shows, as well as the odd popular ballad or gospel song. In all of these pianist Aron Goldin is sensitive to her needs as well as those of the music.

Rangwanasha came to international attention as the winner of the song prize and a finalist for the main prize at the 2021 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Her voice – with its super enriched, multicoloured tone and innate warmth – invariably makes a strong impression combined, in live performances, with an equivalent warmth.

Earth mother: mezzo Malena Ernman delights with a climate-conscious selection

GETTY

Essaying here items in numerous languages, she occasionally reveals a weakness in clarity of diction: her French items – Poulenc's 'Les chemins de l'amour' and Berlioz's 'Le spectre de la rose' from *Nuits d'été* – lack the essential flavour of that language.

Despite her fabulous tone, a certain interpretative blandness disappoints in such much-recorded items as Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' or the famous aria from Catalani's *La Wally*; and while Richard Strauss's 'Morgen!' rises to a certain visionary quality, there is still greater potential to be realised in her undeniable vocal riches.

It is good to have the work of South African composers Stephanus Le Roux Marais (1896-1979) and Benjamin John Peter Tyamzashe (1890-1978) represented – both worth encountering. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Terra Mater

Songs and arias by Arne, Biber, Monteverdi, Torri et al
Malena Ernman (mezzo-soprano); L'Arpeggiata/Christina Pluhar
Erato 2173253375 55:24 mins

TERRA MATER

Christina Pluhar and L'Arpeggiata are extremely experienced performers of 17th- and early 18th-century music. They specialise in an attractive, lively and decorated style of performance with music arranged and adapted from popular as well as classical repertoire. This latest offering, *Terra Mater* (Mother Earth), nods towards current concerns with climate change, though it focuses more on music featuring frogs, nightingales, swans, cuckoos, gardens and flowers than the problematic forces of nature. However, a slightly sideways connection to those forces is that the singer here is Greta Thunberg's mum, Malena Ernman, who happens to be a very accomplished opera singer.

The sequence demonstrates the performers' ability to take us on a stylistic journey from folk-type narratives through to adapted classical pieces, and then full-blown operatic arias. Arne's setting of 'When daisies pied' is sung with slick narrative panache laced with cuckoo calls, and 'The tailor and the mouse' is brought alive by 'Tom and Jerry' style instrumental imitations of the actions. Around half the tracks are purely instrumental and throw up several different soundworlds: the excitable drumming in 'Wallom Green' soon develops into a jam session; while in the English dance 'Newcastle' the jubilant exchanges begin to sound like a Hillbilly instrumental contest. The range and power of Ernman's voice is a delight. Her dark, rich colouring adds drama to Handel's 'Twas when the seas' and the final item by Eden Ahbez brings out her bluesy soul. Fun and finesse throughout. *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Wisdom & Strength
– Contemporary Sacred Choral Music

Works by Kerry Andrew, Alison Willis, Kerensa Briggs et al
Siglo de Oro/Patrick Allies
Delphian DCD34337-CD 69:13 mins

Wisdom
Strength
Siglo de Oro

Imagine an action-packed Sunday of churchgoing, with the major festivals of the Christian year rolled into one, full of varied music that follows the liturgical sequence of Anglican worship, inspired by words that take us from lamentation to joy. Siglo de Oro, known for its brilliant performances of Renaissance music, bring us a stimulating collection of contemporary works that celebrate modern-day spirituality and its connections with the ancient traditions of Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity.

Director Patrick Allies has been a steadfast champion of musical underdogs from the Renaissance. Here, he applies the same spirit of discovery and revelation to works by living women composers. There is spiritual intensity behind these works that speaks of quiet faith and contemplation. This is the understated Oxford-based composer Judith Ward's well-deserved moment in the spotlight: she features on more than half the tracks in this recording, including her 'Mass for St Mark,' her attractive settings of the Responses and the anthem 'O Clap Your Hands', full of dramatic, exhilarating shifts of harmony, fearlessly negotiated here by these accomplished singers.

Striking moments include the flickering vocal effects at the opening of Marisse Cato's Pentecostal 'Flamed Tongue', the anguished dissonances of Shruthi Rajasekar's setting of Psalm 59 and Kerry Andrew's hypnotic improvisation in 'O lux beata Trinitas'. The opening of Alison Willis's Magnificat brings the female voices tenderly to the fore, reminding us of the personal nature of the Virgin Mary's song of praise.

Siglo d'Oro's singing is superlative throughout and the recording captures its luxuriant, intimate and engaging qualities.
Ashutosh Khandekar

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Beethoven's
Fifth Symphony
with Haydn's *Trumpet Concerto*

AAM

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trumpet
Academy of Ancient Music
Laurence Cummings
conductor

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Chamber

CHAMBER CHOICE

DVOŘÁK & PRICE
PIANO QUINTETS
TAKÁCS QUARTET
MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Magical Dvořák crowns this pair of piano quintets

Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin are on sublime form in contrasting works, says *Jan Smaczny*

Care and commitment: Hamelin and Takács Quartet give it their all in Dvořák and Price

Dvořák • Price

Dvořák: Piano Quintet No. 2 in A major;
Price: Piano Quintet in A minor
Marc-André Hamelin (piano); Takács Quartet
Hyperion CDA68433 67:06 mins

Florence Price's music is coming increasingly to the fore and all credit to the Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin for recording her eminently rewarding Piano Quintet. Composed in the 1930s, the quintet – apparently discovered by accident in an attic – inhabits a late-Romantic world, more than a little tinged by Dvořák's 'American' style, though skilfully put together and melodically attractive. But for all its undoubted qualities, the work is out of kilter with a large-scale opening movement outbalancing the remaining three, a pity since the brief finale is in many ways the most imaginative part of the work. Hamelin and the Takács are committed advocates shaping the first movement with finesse and clearly relishing the syncopations and occasionally Blues-influenced melody in the catchy 'Juba' third movement.

> The verve and sheer beauty of the string playing is immediately apparent

Their performance of Dvořák's magical Second Piano Quintet is magnificent. The verve and sheer beauty of the string playing is immediately apparent in the glorious cello solo at the opening, but such exquisite moments never get in the way of a strong feeling for overall structure which pays huge dividends in the outer movements. Care over shaping is also apparent in the *Dumka* slow movement in which the *vivace* central section is exhilarating and perfectly judged without turning, as it often does, into an undignified scramble. A well-balanced recorded sound allows each of the strings to shine where necessary, most notably the viola in the radiant central section of the *Scherzo*, but the lasting impression is of Marc-André Hamelin's beautifully-shaped accompaniment.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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JS Bach

The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080
Phantasm; Daniel Hyde (organ)
Linn Records CKD759 79:44 mins

During the 18th century, fugue came into its own as both a textural compositional device and a musical accomplishment. While our appreciation of JS Bach's contributions to fugue now largely derives from performances of his music by others, contemporary accounts attest to Bach's virtuosic enactment of counterpoint during live performance. In the present day, one of Bach's most compelling advocates is surely Laurence Dreyfus, a musician equally fluent across theory and practice. Dreyfus and his ensemble Phantasm continue their exploration of Bach for Linn Records with this release.

This is in fact Phantasm's second documentation of *The Art of Fugue*. Their first, for Simax Classics, was released in 1998 with only 12 Contrapunctus movements. Their latest album presents all Contrapunctus movements (except BWV 1080/10a) deftly punctuated by the four canons performed on the organ by Daniel Hyde. The successful pairing of string (viol quartet) and wind (pipe organ) sonorities preserves a most welcome timbral homogeneity within each movement. Amidst such truly bewitching music-making it is difficult to isolate individual tracks.

In Contrapunctus 6 'in Stylo Francese' Phantasm prioritise articulatory clarity, allowing the sheer complexity of the musical fabric to sound more organic. In the hands of four viol players, this movement as well as the mirror fugues, Contrapunctus 12 and 13, are thus liberated from the physical confines of a keyboard. The album ends with the unfinished *Fuga a 3 Soggetti*, a meticulously fashioned and moving aural testimony to the enduring potency of Bach's music.
Ingrid Pearson

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Sally Beamish • Haydn

Haydn: Piano Trios Nos 26, 31, 34, 36; **Sally Beamish:** Trance
Trio Gaspard
Chandos CHAN20330 66:53 mins

HAYDN
THE COMPLETE
CHANDOS
TRIO GASPARD

Haydn's piano trios contain some of the greatest keyboard music in the second half of the 18th century. Not that the violin and cello parts are in any way superfluous, but their presence seems to have inspired the composer to produce his most adventurous flights of fantasy for the piano. The slow movement of the B flat Trio, H.20 even has long passages for the left hand alone; while the first two movements of the E flat Trio, H.22 feature crossed-hands leaps of the kind quite often found in Haydn's trios, but much more rarely in his solo sonatas. The Trio Gaspard's spontaneous-sounding performances bring these pieces vividly to life, generally conveying their character very well. In his introductory booklet note the ensemble's pianist, Nicholas Rimmer, describes the opening of H.20 as 'beguilingly elegant', though with its wide melodic skips and unruly sweeping piano scales the music ought perhaps to sound more forthright and grandiose than it does in the Gaspard's intimate account.

As with the previous instalments of this cycle, the players have commissioned a short piece from a contemporary composer to complement their Haydn. Here, Sally Beamish's *Trance* invokes distant, ghost-like echoes of the slow movement from Haydn's great Trio in F sharp minor, in a memorial tribute to her late violinist mother. A pity Beamish's piece couldn't have stood alongside that particular Haydn, since it was included in the first volume of the Trio Gaspard's series, but it forms a perfectly satisfying stand-alone piece all the same. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

A Bach canon blast: Daniel Hyde's organ adds a welcome dimension to Phantasm's *Art of Fugue*

Boulez

Livre pour Quatuor

Quatuor Diotima

Pentatone PTC 5187 360 56:08 mins

Boulez Livre pour Quatuor
Quatuor Diotima

Most composers prefer to move on once a work is complete, often out of practical considerations (there is no incentive greater than the unpaid bill that necessitates another commission). But some do return to historic scores, painting over older versions and adding multiple 'rev' dates. Pierre Boulez is particularly noted for his revisions, which were regularly undertaken as part of his creative process. The String Quartet began life in 1948, was reworked considerably in the decade after, and was eventually renamed *Livre pour Quatuor* (Book for Quartet). The composer continued to recalibrate it until 2012, working closely with the Diotima Quartet to tweak the work to the version we hear here.

The biggest difference between this and previous recordings (the Parisii Quartet plays the 1962 version in the Deutsche Grammophon box set that has just been released to coincide with Boulez's centenary) is the fourth movement, which has been newly reconstructed by Philippe Manoury based on the 2017 score. Amid current discussion and demonstration about what AI can achieve in such fields, it is pleasing to hear this painstaking, musicologically led approach. The Diotimas spent considerable time with Boulez to understand his thinking, and it shows: the sparse passages in the opening movements breathe unencumbered, the shivering development is scattered with pizzicato notes. These become more important in the later middle section, strewn over seemingly throwaway small phrases. The balance here, and in the final more detailed movements, is excellent, with subtlety achieved throughout. Structurally, *Livre pour Quatuor* casts six sections (with some sub sections) into pairs – the Diotimas sensitively signpost the relationships while allowing fluidity in this complex, occasionally standoffish, work. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Khachaturian

Song-Poem In Honor of Ashoughs; Dance No. 1; Sonata for Violin and Piano; Gayaneh – Adagio for Solo Violin, Aisha's Dance and Sabre Dance; Sonata-monologue for Solo Violin; Nocturne from Masquerade Suite; Dance (The Dancing Violin)

David Haroutunian (violin), Xénia Maliarevitch (piano)

Fuga Libera FUG840 61:53 mins

This album arose out of a post-concert conversation between David Haroutunian, Xénia Maliarevitch and Karen Khachaturian, the latter being the son of the Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian. The concert had been to mark the 40th anniversary of Khachaturian Sr's death, and afterwards Karen had presented the musicians with the score of a previously unpublished sonata for violin and piano composed by his father in the early 1930s.

'I had no idea such a work existed,' says Haroutunian, despite the fact that he had thoroughly explored the Armenian violin repertoire. 'The sonata's avant-garde aesthetic won us over from the very first time we played it.' He thinks it likely that the composer chose not to publish it, to avoid having to submit it to the Union of Soviet Composers for approval.

This work is in two movements, and the first – sweetly lyrical – has intimate charm; the way it's played here evokes a peaceful musical landscape. The violin part in the second has more of a cutting edge, but it's still tonal and only gently Modernist: a far cry from the swashbuckling music of the ballet score for *Gayaneh* which we normally associate with Aram Khachaturian's name. But that too figures in this selection, thanks to Heifetz's arrangements of three dances from it.

Two other works on this album reflect yet more aspects of Aram's oeuvre: the mysteriously laconic *Sonata-monologue for Solo Violin*, and *Song-Poem in Honour of Ashoughs*, which reflects the composer's devotion to the bardic folk music – patiently collected by Komitas – which he grew up listening to in his Georgian birth-town, Tbilisi. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

DAVID HINITT, PATRICK ALLEN/OPERAOMNIA.CO.UK

Harmonie du soir

Piano Trios by Ravel and Schubert

Trio con Brio Copenhagen

Orchid Classics ORC100363 65:50 mins

Harmonie du soir
Ravel | Schubert
Trio con Brio Copenhagen

Trio con brio Copenhagen describes the Ravel Trio as a 'glitterball', arguing that Schubert's B flat Trio is all about the 'moulding of time'. Perhaps, but like all generalisations they only take us so far. There's glitter aplenty in Schubert's piano octaves and string *tremolandos*, while Ravel's *Passacaille* ends in the murkiest piano depths – the darkness so all-consuming that the opening dazzle of the finale necessitates polaroids.

The Copenhagens released a recording of the Ravel in 2007, and by the clock little has changed over the intervening years. But they approach it with a heightened feeling for Ravel's sophistication in manipulating his motifs, and the first movement's frequent changes of tempo are accommodated with a ravishing fluidity, the closing bars expertly navigating delicacy and mystery – right down to the cellist's final *ppp* pizzicato.

The pent-up power of the *Pantoum* second movement is quiveringly alive, ricocheting between staccato sparkiness and a shimmering voluptuous sweep scorched by the heat of a Spanish sun. And enfolded with enrapt nobility the third movement *Passacaille* builds inexorably to a powerful climax – discharged in the mercurial finale whose quicksilver figuration is tossed off with bravura to spare.

Nimbly articulated, the Schubert is similarly fastidious, and the symphonic aspirations of the first movement yield a central section of almost titanic struggle. Just very occasionally the playing is a little po-faced; and while the scampering *Scherzo* is lithe and playful, its *Trio* is a touch austere, the staccato piano chords a little too 'present'. Trio con Brio released an album of D898's E flat sibling last year (also on Orchid Classics); together they're a distinguished addition to the Schubert discography, but here the Ravel steals a small, but decisive march. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Ravishing Ravel: Trio con Brio Copenhagen offer an expert navigation of the composer's Trio

NIKOLAJ LUND

Two Violas – *Regeneration*

Works by JS Bach, Bowen, Elgar, Gibbons, Sally Beamish et al

Peter Mallinson, Matthias Wiesner (viola), Lynn Arnold (piano)

Merdian CDE 84684 69:41 mins

Two Violas
Regeneration

Richly honeyed timbres of two volas in stylistically varied dialogues is an alluring prospect. And diversity is the defining element of this enterprising release with repertoire ranging from Renaissance to Modern. Of the works for two violas, Detlev Glanert's *The Pleiades*, written in 2023, is the centrepiece, based on the mythology of the seven sisters – a star cluster, which appears in ancient Chinese literature. Tightly worked contrapuntal Hindemithian invention is a distinctive feature of this work, and Peter Mallinson and Matthias Wiesner give sharply etched characterisations of these cameos. Sally Beamish's *Prelude and Canon,* originally for two violins and presented here in a 2019 arrangement, also boasts influences of Hindemith as well as Bartók, alongside the folk music of Scotland. Lean imitations of bagpipes grace the musical invention before the dialogue becomes more intense. Rhythmically alert, the playing is again well drawn.

Bach's music translates to almost any combination of instruments, and the adaptation of the G minor Viola da Gamba Sonata works well, although using a piano as the instrumental partner creates a heavyweight timbre. Bach's sumptuous material is marginally impaired by less-than-perfect ensemble in the final movement. Elgar's 'The Wild Bears' also feels slightly stretched in this regard.

Peter Letanka's *Gershwinian Nostalgia* is a fun pot-pourri, but again doesn't quite feel a comfortable fit, the 'swing' element sounding rather self-conscious in this performance. York Bowen's short and attractive *Duo,* however, brings the team back onto more comfortable terrain with a brilliant rendition. Three duets from Alexander Wunderer provide quite attractive, romantic, warmly played salon pieces, and a similarly accessible, melodious, popular music style features in Raymond Yiu's *Three Shidaiqu Transcriptions. Jo Talbot*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Violino òver cornetto

Works by Castello, Frescobaldi, Marini, Patta et al

Seicento Stravagante

BIS BIS-2726 58:22 mins

VIOLINO över CORNETTO
SEICENTO STRAVAGANTE

This programme of musical 'conversations' from the dawn of the 17th century highlights the spellbinding virtuosity of the Baroque cornett and violin – long-term rivals for the title of 'the king of instruments.' Preeminent among the composers represented here are Girolamo Frescobaldi, Dario Castello and Biagio Marini, but they certainly don't outshine their more shadowy contemporaries: Gabriele and Francesco Usper Sponga, Giovanni Battista Buonamente, Serafino Patta and others. The selection highlights the conversational qualities of the early Italian Baroque idiom with a range of pieces – from simple dialogues like Patta's *La Lampugnana* to extravagant discourses like Castello's *Sonata quarta*.

This repertoire is, in many ways, the Baroque equivalent of jazz, with its improvisatory spirit, flashy bravura and frequent riffing on popular tunes or bass lines. Cornettist David Brutti, (also an accomplished saxophonist) brings all the spontaneity, pliancy and virtuosity of jazz to these accounts – not to mention a rich-toned lyricism, revealing why the cornett was prized for its affinity with the human voice. Brutti is ably partnered by Baroque violinist Rossella Croce, who navigates the intricate diminutions and melismas with grace and agility, while Nicola Lamon provides stylish continuo realisations on harpsichord and organ. The ensemble revels in the playful exchanges of Legrenzi's *La Strasolda*, the refined colloquy of Buonamente's *Sonata Quinta* and the whimsical imitations of crowing hens and piping cuckoos in three delightful ornithological pieces. My only quibble is that, in some works, the violin and harpsichord are just a whisker distant in the balance. Punctuating the pieces are organ solos, played with subtle elegance by Lamon on an exquisite early 17th-century Italian instrument. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

Unrivalled Ravel in this clever tribute

Nicholas Kenyon enjoys Bertrand Chamayou's vision and gripping performance

BERTRAND CHAMAYOU
Ravel fragments

Ravel Fragments

Works by Ravel, Tansman et al
Bertrand Chamayou (piano)
Erato 2173260123 58:31 mins

Ravel was a fastidious composer, but not a very accomplished pianist: biographer Roger Nichols quotes the daunting review that 'only a supreme ironist would consent to play his own beautiful music in public as badly as Ravel plays it'. But Ravel nevertheless made keyboard transcriptions of his orchestral works, including fragments from *Daphnis et Chloé*, which the marvellous pianist Bertrand Chamayou (who has already recorded all Ravel's original piano music) has now assembled into an imaginative collection of original and tribute pieces, including a couple of his own new transcriptions.

With most of the 15 tracks two or three minutes long, I feared this would be a bitty collection, but I reckoned without Chamayou's meticulous planning: the *Daphnis* extracts frame the varied colours of Alexandre Tansman's tiny but powerful *Prélude No. 5 (Hommage à Maurice Ravel)*, Joaquin Nin's Spanish-tinged *Mensaje a Ravel*, polytonal Betsy Jolas and more conventional Arthur Honegger, all perfectly characterised. Salvatore Sciarrino splashes the keyboard with sea foam in *De la nuit*, while the least-known composer is surely Frédéric Durieux, whose homage piece sounds stuck in a hypnotic groove.

But it shows the cleverness of Chamayou's sequence that the grumbling bass of Durieux's conclusion leads seamlessly into the subterranean start of the album's longest and finest track, a piano version of Ravel's *La valse* which sounds as if at least six hands are at work. This is a titanic, gripping account of this tumultuous piece, combining impact with warmth and projecting with absolute clarity the collapse of civilization around us. A timely vision.

> This is a titanic account of Ravel's tumultuous *La valse*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Clever curation: Bertrand Chamayou has put together a winning programme

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JS Bach

Toccata, Partita and Suites for Solo Violin (Metamorphoses)
Marco Serino (violin)
Arcana A577 67:11 mins

This release demonstrates the art of transcription, not in the sense of adapting a piece from one epoch to another but adapting a work to a different instrumental idiom. JS Bach frequently practised this art, –indeed a transformation if we consider the E major Prelude for solo violin which provided a dazzling Sinfonia for concertante organ and orchestra to the Cantata, BWV 29.

Marco Serino has chosen the First and Second of Bach's Cello Suites which he has transcribed for his own instrument, the violin. No such transcriptions of these pieces exist by Bach, himself, though in the light of his activities in this sphere we might surmise a nod of approval. The remaining transcription is of the celebrated organ *Toccata and Fugue*, BWV 565. Various hypotheses suggest that this, too, might have been transcribed in Bach's time from music intended for another instrument altogether. The principal item in Serino's programme is the Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin with its breathtakingly ambitious *Ciaconna*. Here is the high watermark of the recording and the only piece here in Bach's autograph, and which has not required key transpositions.

Serino draws a warm sound from his 1661 Amati violin and this is vividly projected in the excellent recorded acoustic. His clearly defined articulation, delicate dynamic shading and eloquent, lingering gestures engage our attention and delight our senses. He has a refreshingly light-footed understanding of dance measures as, for example in the *Giga* of the Partita which he infuses with commendable playfulness. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

JS Bach

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 2
Masato Suzuki (harpsichord)
BIS BIS-2631 142:23 mins (2CD)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
MASATO SUZUKI

Masaaki and Masato Suzuki – father and son – are easy to confuse. They till the same territory, with JS Bach and the Baroque at the centre of their work. And they employ the same instruments: organ, harpsichord, piano and mixed choir. But Masato has stolen a march on his famous father with a now-completed harpsichord recording of Bach's '48'.

MARCO BORGGREVE

He precedes his recording with a relentlessly scholarly essay by Yo Tomita on the incomplete (and not always agreeing) extant manuscripts. Much of this is academic tail-chasing, but it reminds us of some useful insights.

Book two of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was essentially a teaching work, Tomita observes, which Bach was continually revising; he didn't compose it sequentially from beginning to end, but in batches of pairs, first with the commonly used keys, then with the more rarely used ones. Rather than reading Tomita, however, listeners would do better to read Angela Hewitt's much more illuminating liner note to her 2009 recording of these works.

Suzuki's manner is bright and muscular, and he has the ability to make the longest pieces convincingly cohere – useful when the preludes attain something approaching full sonata form. There are times when I could have wished for greater contrasts in mood and colour, but whether in the joyfully nimble D flat Prelude, for example, or the sedately pretty E flat major one, Suzuki finds himself comfortably at home.

My only serious caveat lies in his treatment of the 14th Prelude, which is the most plangently beautiful piece in the book. Yet Suzuki despatches it with rough briskness. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Satie

Trois Gymnopédies; Gnossiennes Nos 1-5 etc
Alain Planès (piano) et al
Harmonia Mundi HMM902749
70:24 mins

SATIE PLANES

How to commemorate the centenary of Satie's death? For pianist Alain Planès, with an especially personal tribute, and not just because he states he has 'worshipped' this quixotic composer since childhood. Planès continues a lineage of Satie playing created by the composer's favoured interpreter, Ricardo Viñes. The result is a searching, intelligently curated selection brought to life on a warm, yet spritely 1928 Pleyel piano, the crystalline upper register a perfect match for the fifth *Gnossienne*.

Naturally, Planès includes the *Gymnopédies*, sprinkling these elusive pieces and the *Gnossiennes* amidst more playful fare, such as the noodlings of *Avant-dernières pensées* or musical parodies of *Embryons desséchés*. Planès continues the heritage of approaching the music with detachment, but there is plenty of warmth or whimsical humanity. He is suitably capricious in the rare *Chapitres tournés en tous sens* and captures the vacillations of the *Gnossiennes* exquisitely, sublimely winding down at the end of the third or seemingly improvising the fourth's ethereal musings.

Francois Pinel provides an additional pair of hands for *Trois Morceaux en forme de Poire*, moving as one with Planès, whether rambunctious outbursts in 'Morceau I' or the repetitive meanderings of 'En plus'. Marc Mauillon is the quintessentially gallic baritone and charmingly droll in the *Trois melodies* of 1916. Only the *Gymnopédies* are a little over-thought, with an occasional brittleness to the tone. Overall, though, Planès is notable for the consummate judgement of pacing and touch. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Sondheim

Works arr. piano by Jon Batiste, Jeff Beal, Stephen Hough et al
Anthony de Mare (piano)
Avie AV2694 76:51 mins

Commissioned in honour of Sondheim's 90th birthday, the role of these 14 new works shifted gear when the planned premiere in March 2020 was kiboshed due to Covid. They now stand as a celebration of Sondheim's legacy: the composer died in 2021 having seen some of the scores – which, pianist Anthony de Mare is at pains to tell us repeatedly in the sleeve notes, he thought were 'terrific'.

The works reimagine Sondheim songs for solo piano. Stephen Hough sets 'Pretty Lady' from the lesser-performed musical *Pacific Overtures* in a Satie-style *gymnopédie*, while Timo Andres recasts 'I Know Things Now' from *Into the Woods* in a new harmonic framework, as though heard through a piece of refracted glass. Jon Batiste's blend of songs from *Assassins* – a musical centred around nine attempts of political assassination – is one of the most politicised reimaginings, blending piano melodies with clips from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr and Presidents JFK and Donald Trump to represent the US's complex history with gun violence.

Broad strokes: George Xiaoyuan Fu's *Colouring Book* is imaginative

BEN EALOVEGA

There are only fleeting moments throughout the album where we feel as though we are getting close to the piano reduction of a Sondheim score: they are quickly taken in unusual directions, exploring different timbres of the instrument and experimenting with texture. A few note slips in the playing occasionally confuse the ear, particularly as it is already straying from familiar material.

It's an unusual opportunity to hear Sondheim works in new settings, with some more successful than others. *Freya Parr*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★

Chronicles for Solo Violin

Works by Eckhardt-Gramatté, Maconchy and Sally Beamish
Katrina Lee (violin)
Delphian DCD34338 78:24 mins

Chronicles
KATRINA LEE

For someone who composed so much, starting when she was six, and leaving a concerto unfinished when she died at 75, Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté is surprisingly little known. The ten caprices from 1924-34 saw her living in Spain and Germany, and were tailored to her considerable talents as a performer. They contain nods to the dancing rhythms of the Baroque, as well as extended elegiac movements, and some improvisatory ones with titles reflecting her international travels: 'La Isla de Oro' in Mallorca; 'Danse marocaine' with tinges of Ravel's *Tzigane*; and 'Chestnut Hill at Night', painting a picture of a district in Philadelphia. Some of the longer caprices outstay their welcome, but they are all played with concentration and engagement by Lee, whose double-stops are fearsomely accurate, tonal palette attractively varied, and who inhabits the various rhythmic profiles – discursive, incisive or perky – with utter confidence.

Maconchy's *Miniatures* are more concentrated, and a couple are so short as to create a blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment. She has a wider harmonic language than Eckhardt-Gramatté but can also easily switch between various characters: the fifth miniature, 'Lullaby', intersperses an affectingly swaying song with more playful interludes, and the final brief *Badinage* dances in quintuple time with alternating plucked and bowed phrases.

The Wise Maid is an Irish folk tune, which Beamish uses as the basis for a set of increasingly complex variations. Written as an encore piece, it is inevitably short but makes a good bridge between the two older composers and again finds Lee on top form. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Colouring Book

Works by Debussy, Matthew Aucoin, George Xiaoyuan Fu and Ninfea Crutwell-Reade
George Xiaoyuan Fu (piano)
Platoon PLAT26200 67:29 mins

COLOURING BOOK
GEORGE XIAOYUAN FU

The cover is eye-catching. Pianist George Xiaoyuan Fu splattered and smeared with paint in neon pink, swamp green, acid yellow and pure white. Inside the booklet are more playful images with colourful explosions of paint. The title *Colouring Book*, while never explained, only adds to the sense this is an artist who unites seriousness and playfulness, intellectual curiosity and imagination. And so it proves in his playing.

His refreshing programme is framed by the two books of Debussy's dozen *Études*, which he composed in 1915, the notes of Chopin's milestone *Études* fresh in his mind after editing a new critical edition for Durand. Fu makes them sound as if they had just been written, his playing wonderfully clean and crisp, never overstated but often marvellous. In 'Pour les tierces', he turns this exercise in smooth *legato* playing in thirds into a magical soundscape that ebbs and flows like the sea, while dazzling fireworks sparkle across the sky in 'Pour les huits doigts'. Pictures are painted, vividly, but also Fu relishes the purely musical aspects: colour, sonority, harmony.

The contemporary numbers make for a fresh twist. Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade's *Three études for piano and flower pots* (filled with water, tuned and played by James Larter) are brilliant miniatures. In 'Reflective', the pianist is cast in a soothing role, while piano and flower pots constantly jostle in the spiky, sparky 'Vivacious'. A flower-pot tremolo colours 'Ethereal', answered by piano chords that, in this context, evoke the ghost of Chopin. Matthew Aucoin's *Three Études* are more enigmatic: a violent, fragmentary 'rondo which devours itself', a non-stop 'Currents' and the contemplative 'sounding'. Fu's own *passacaglia* on a theme by Radiohead might not be a study, but earns its place in this imaginative recital. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Opening

Works by Chopin, Schubert, Philip Glass, Alvidas Remesa
Ignas Maknickas (piano)
Deux-Elles DXL1209 60:25 mins

The familiar pulsing cross rhythms and resonant, repetitive melodies of 'Opening' make it one of Glass's most enduring works – it's a stalwart in today's playlists. Originally part of 1981 chamber collection *Glassworks*, the solo piano piece is minimalism at its most accessible. In recent years, the arrangement has been elevated by some major recordings, namely Víkingur Ólafsson (Deutsche Grammophon, 2017) and Glass's own lockdown project (Orange Mountain, 2024). Ignas Maknickas often starts recitals with the piece, and it is the titular work to this, his debut recording. Here it is gently percussive, with all the inner voices laid bare, the ebb and flow enhanced by some thoughtful dynamics. It's a counterpoint to the abrupt *Andantino*, the first of five miniatures by Lithuanian composer Alvidas Remesa. The *Stigmata* collection was new to me, but is firmly embedded into Maknickas's pianism, having studied in Lithuania (and the UK's Royal Academy of Music). From the darkly shimmering *Andante* and slickly iridescent *Adagio*, via the dance-like *Allegro* and mercurial *Misterioso*, this is an enjoyable and evocative work. Maknickas draws on the distinctive palette of the Fazioli piano, particularly in the quieter moments. The two Chopin Nocturnes (C sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 1 and D-flat Op. 27, No. 2) fit naturally into this soundworld, although the darker shades are not always flattered by the recording. Schubert's Sonata No. 21 closes this transcendental programme; while the *Scherzo* provides almost jarring contrasts, Maknickas draws connections between the rippling, reflective first movement and the Glassian motifs, tying together an impressive recital album.
Claire Jackson

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Sur le nom d'Alain

Works by Alain and Duruflé
Matthew Martin (organ)
Ad Fontes AF010 75:15 mins

Sur le nom d'Alain

Taking its title from Duruflé's *Prélude et Fugue sur le nom d'Alain*, this album brilliantly juxtaposes two Parisian composers best known to organists but deserving wider appreciation. The composers could hardly be more different: the fastidious Maurice Duruflé (1902-86) lived a long life yet left only a small number of works, of which the most famous is his Requiem, whereas the life of Jehan Alain (1911-40) was tragically cut short in war but not before he'd written a large number of pieces. These days Alain is remembered only for his organ music, though his output for the piano (and his even more overlooked Jewish liturgical music) would surely repay attention.

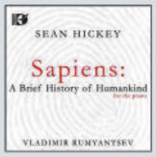
Matthew Martin plays both composers with equal command on the Ruffatti organ of Buckfast Abbey, an instrument whose 'symphonic' sound is well suited to this music. The pedal lines not only burst out, they are notably exciting. The music of Alain can be quirky, as heard in the exotic registrations deployed in his *Aria*, but the *Variations sur Lucis Creator* sound majestic here. Duruflé calls for (and receives) more obvious virtuosity in his Suite – whose first movement opens with 90 seconds of sustained B flats, surely a record and maybe an organists' joke – and especially in his *Prélude et Fugue*. Though it makes sense to end with Alain's most famous work, *Litanies*, a dancing incantation given a rhythmically free and flexible performance, the *Prélude et Fugue* is the highlight for sheer sound.
John Allison

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Sean Hickey Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind...

Vladimir Rumyantsev (piano) ***Sono Luminus DSL-92285 52:06 mins***



Usually, you read a bestseller and respond inwardly or debate its merits with other readers. Sean Hickey's response to Yuval Noah Harari's compelling take on the story of humankind is this eight-part piano reflection. Hickey takes us through a vividly inventive interpretation of Harari's themes, demanding extended techniques and no small amount of virtuosity from Rumyantsev. *Michael Beek* ★★★

Liszt Piano Sonata in B minor etc

Lise de la Salle (piano) ***Naïve V8602 55:07 mins***

PHANTASMAGORIA
LISE DE LA SALLE
LISZT

Lise de la Salle here marks a 20-year recording relationship with the music of Liszt. Even in the most bombastic passages, she retains a sensitivity of touch that elevates the performance above mere technical display, and in gentler movements, such as the Sonata's *Cantando espressivo* and *Andante sostenuto*, she's dreamily graceful. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

L'Orgue Spirituel Works by Franck and Tournemire

Peter Stevens (organ) ***Ad Fontes AF013 86:01 mins***

L'Orgue Spirituel

Master (Franck) and pupil (Tournemire) are brought together here, also linked, to greater or lesser extent, by a theme of Gregorian chant. Resisting the temptation to unleash all-guns-blazing Tournemire on the organ of Westminster Cathedral, Peter Stevens opts to show the French composer's more meditative side, followed by Franck's *Trois Chorals*, whose singing lines are brought out beautifully in these well paced performances. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★

Jazz

Garry Booth's latest round-up takes in some cracking collaborations and combos

JAZZ CHOICE

A timely commentary

Ambrose Akinmusire delivers an eloquently powerful view on America's social struggles

Uncompromising artistry: Ambrose Akinmusire's music and words demand attention

BALAZS GARDI

Ambrose Akinmusire
Honey From a Winter Stone

Ambrose Akinmusire

Honey From a Winter Stone

Ambrose Akinmusire (trumpet), Kokayi (vocals), Sam Harris (piano) et al

Nonesuch 75597905984

Ambrose Akinmusire's creative range means that he's always in demand as a collaborator. He's brought his sound to diverse artists, ranging from piano galactico Brad Mehldau to oud crossover star Dhafer Youssef. His last album as leader, *Owl Song*, was a quiet masterpiece made with guitarist Bill Frisell and drummer Herlin Riley. This recording was inspired by experimental composer Julius Eastman and his organic music concept. That's translated into five richly textured, layered (and then often delayered) pieces that speak directly to the struggles facing black men in America. Four of the pieces feature the improvising vocalist Kokayi, favoured by the leader for his instinctive musicality. Akinmusire heralds his arrival on 'Muffled Screams' with an anguished solo, Kokayi entering, with strings, to describe heartfelt parental anxiety. The swelling soundscape around the spoken text (written by Akinmusire) is gorgeous. 'Bloomed' begins with the Mivos Quartet in minimalist modern chamber mode before Akinmusire's lambent horn rides in on the back of Brown's twitchy beats. 'MYanx' has a hip-hop dynamic, Kokayi and trumpet freestyling over an angsty synth rumble. Powerful, eloquent social commentary when we most need it. ★★★★★

May round-up

BRANFORD MARSALIS QUARTET
Belonging

Like trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire (see Jazz Choice), saxophonist ***Branford Marsalis*** was a creative force to be reckoned with from an early age. But in 1974, when Keith Jarrett released his European quartet album ***Belonging***, the young Marsalis was still at High School listening to R&B. Fast forward 50 years and Marsalis's quartet has released a full album reinterpretation of this classic recording. A chamber jazz reworking, compared with the original's more folksy feel, it's not a studied tribute and the close knit quartet (pianist Joey Calderazzo, bassist Eric Revis, drummer Justin Faulkner) swings joyously through standout numbers like 'Swing Dance' and 'The Windup'. I played Marsalis's version of the title track back-to-back with the sparser original, which featured Jan Garbarek on soprano sax, for a double dose of dopamine. *(Blue Note 7548659)* ★★★★★

Dreamweavers, a collaboration between virtuoso guitarist Chris Allard and composer/producer Mike Trim, is a match made in hybrid jazz heaven. Allard, an in-demand soloist on the jazz circuit, brings most of the tunes while Trim, himself an accomplished guitarist, is a gifted producer. Their debut as co-leaders, ***Woven in Time***, is a highly polished programme of jazz fusion that maintains a seamless continuity between numbers while at the same time drawing from an extraordinary range of diverse genres. An expansive soundscape makes the rocky 'Driving Home' an immersive cinematic experience while 'Migration', with its percussive element and Trim on mando cello, has a Moorish vibe; 'Bossa Para Rosa' showcases Allard's swinging acoustic chops. *(Perdido DOR 2501)* ★★★★

Dreamweavers
Woven in Time

Norwegian singer ***Solveig Slettahjell*** came to prominence in 2003, fronting the Slow Motion Orchestra, as a kind of Scandinavian Blossom Dearie. Over time, and with strong, original material, she has carved her own intimate niche. On new release ***In The Country*** Slettahjell applies her velvety styling to superb settings (penned by longtime collaborator Martin Qvenild) of poems by Emily's Brontë and Dickinson. The subtle weaving of acoustic and electric sound especially gives the ballads an ethereal quality. Additional recitation from guest ECM artist Sidsel Endresen is the icing on the cake. *(Jazzland Recordings 3779683)* ★★★★

Consentrik Quartet is the new band led by electric guitarist Nels Cline. Best known for lead guitar duties in the Chicago alt rock band Wilco, Cline has also garnered a following for his side hustles in modern jazz. He's joined on this eponymous debut by left field saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, whose plangent tenor tone is a perfect foil for Cline's ominous, splintered chords and spiky shards of notes. Tom Rainey's bustling drums and bassist Chris Lightcap's fat but nimble bass complete a wholly captivating sound. *(Blue Note 7560207)* ★★★★

Rising piano star ***Benny Lackner*** is a master in the art of reduction. A prolific writer he works hard to sift his tunes. Nine made the cut (from 100!) for new release ***Spindrift*** and were then carefully arranged for a select quintet featuring tenorist Mark Turner and trumpeter Mathias Eick on the frontline. The interplay is simply beautiful, each compact song distilled to a totally absorbing, quintessentially ECM essence. *(ECM 752 8004)* ★★★★

Books

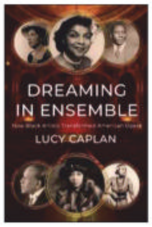
Our critics cast their eyes over the latest selection of books on all things music

Dreaming in Ensemble

Lucy Caplan

Harvard 336pp £29.95

If you believe that Marian Anderson singing Ulrica in *Il Trovatore* at The Met on 7 January 1956 was a first for operatic Black Americans then Lucy Caplan's *Dreaming in Ensemble* will put you right. In a scrupulously researched history, she argues that in the 20th century 'through creative acts of transgression and imagination African Americans redefined opera as a well-spring of aesthetic innovation, collective sociality and anti-racist activism.'

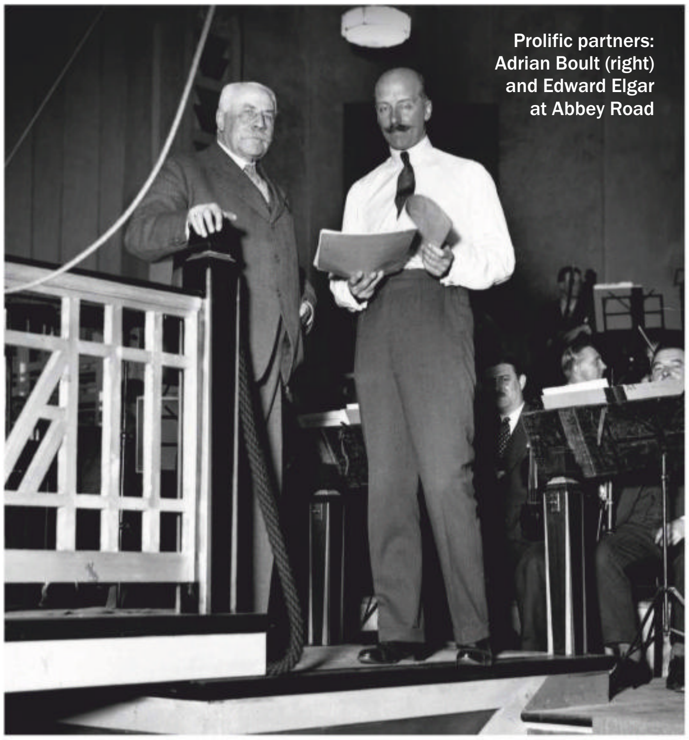


While Black singers may have been barred from singing on stage, they were there as supernumeraries, particularly in America's favourite Verdi, *Aida*, and foot soldiers in the behind-scenes army that gets an opera on stage.

In their own lives they took singing classes, performed operas from the white Western canon, were impresarios, music critics and composed – notably Harry Lawrence Freeman and Shirley Graham, of whose opera *Tom-Tom* Caplan writes eloquently.

Caplan reads this history through the prism of contemporary cultural theory, so that meaning is sometimes seen through a glass darkly. But this should not obscure her achievement in writing a history that has been all but ignored.

Christopher Cook ★★★



Prolific partners: Adrian Boult (right) and Edward Elgar at Abbey Road

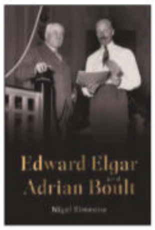
GETTY

Edward Elgar and Adrian Boult

Nigel Simeone

Boydell 340pp (hb) £55

In 1924 Adrian Boult wrote to Edward Elgar, explaining that to save money he was proposing to perform the composer's choral work *The Dream of Gerontius* with a reduced woodwind section. Elgar reacted with 'acute' displeasure, and it was seven years before the two spoke cordially again. Overall, however, theirs was arguably the most prolific and mutually respectful conductor-composer relationship in British music history. Boult conducted Elgar's music indefatigably over a period of six decades, racking up hundreds of performances and making numerous acclaimed recordings. Nigel Simeone charts Boult's devotion in this absorbing new study, drawing liberally on correspondence and contemporary press cuttings. Early chapters summarise the broad outline of their professional collaboration, while chapters on Boult's performances of Elgar's symphonies, concertos and other works provide fascinating detail on his evolving interpretations. There are useful appendices, including a chronology of all Boult's Elgar performances (over 200 of the *Enigma Variations* alone) and a discography. Those who know Boult's Elgar well will find Simeone's backstory compelling.



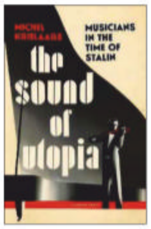
Terry Blain ★★★★

The Sound of Utopia

Michel Krielaars; Translated by Jonathan Reeder

Pushkin Press 336pp (hb) £25

Given the endless retellings of Shostakovich's life under Stalin, Michel Krielaars cannily offers popular-history potted biographies of other musicians in similar situations. He has an easy-going, personable style, well rendered in Jonathan Reeder's translation, and I learned a lot: further investigation of music by Vsevolod Zaderatsky and recordings by singers Klavdiya Shulzhenko and Vadim Kozin is essential.



Knowledge is probably a dangerous thing when it comes to assessing his portrait of Prokofiev. It may sound less like sour grapes if I note that in the bibliography he ignores not only my Prokofiev biography, but also Harlow Robinson's. Relying too much on Simon Morrison's astoundingly (and suddenly) negative take in *The Love and Wars of Lina Prokofiev*, he portrays Prokofiev as a 'cold, ambitious egotist who did whatever was necessary to ingratiate himself with the communist authorities'. 'Conceit and vanity', 'self-seeking', 'fawning', 'hard-as-nails ambition', 'inflated self-esteem': on and on it goes. Even Khrennikov, general secretary of the Soviet Composers' Union, gets a more nuanced assessment. So, approach the rest with caution, but enjoy the readable and appropriately gossipy style.

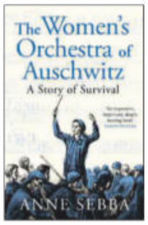
David Nice ★★★

The Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz

Anne Sebba

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 304pp (hb) £22

Few more grotesque perversions of musical activity were unveiled by the Nazis than the orchestra made up of female prisoners that was established in Auschwitz in 1943. The orchestra's main remit was to perform a medley of marches and other upbeat pieces as daily 'entertainment' for the camp inmates engaged in and often physically broken by forced labour. From time to time, the orchestra was also expected to give concerts for the amusement of the SS Officers in charge of the camp. The musicians who agreed to join the orchestra soon realised that their participation in such monstruous undertakings effectively saved their lives. But they were also wracked with guilt for surviving while their friends and families went to the gas chamber.



Anne Sebba's painstakingly researched, and sensitively written account highlights the moral dilemmas, personality clashes and the political and racial jockeying faced by the individual members who joined the orchestra. It's a profoundly moving story that also manages to retain a degree of objectivity in describing the horrific circumstances under which these musicians were expected to work.

Erik Levi ★★★★★

From the archives

Andrew McGregor looks over this month's reissued and live archive recordings

ARCHIVE CHOICE

Passion and poignance

Jacqueline du Pré's concerto recordings have been remastered and sound better than ever

Famous takes: Du Pré's legacy remains legendary

THE GREAT CELLO CONCERTOS by Jacqueline du Pré

The Great Cello Concertos by Jacqueline du Pré

Works by Elgar, Dvořák, Lalo, Saint-Saëns, Schumann et al

Jacqueline du Pré (cello) et al

Warner Classics 2173252029 277:37 mins (4CD)

'What is it about some artists that keeps their memory alive longer – brighter – in the mind and the heart?' asks filmmaker Christopher Nupen in his introduction to these concerto recordings of his friend, the cellist Jacqueline du Pré. For Nupen, the magic starts with the unmistakable, wondrous sounds they make, and listening again to these famous recordings is to feel du Pré's powerful musical personality inhabit not just every phrase, but every note. It makes her legendary recording of the Elgar Concerto with Barbirolli almost unbearably poignant and brings passion and spontaneous exuberance to her classic accounts of the Schumann, Dvořák and Saint-Saëns concertos. The almost operatic drama of the Lalo Concerto with husband Daniel Barenboim live in Cleveland is a great fit, but sometimes the unremitting intensity can be too much – the Boccherini Concerto No. 9 is overpowered, by soloist and orchestra – although there's more light and air in the Haydn concertos than you might expect. Recently remastered from the original masters for digital release, and sounding better than ever, with an extra degree of clarity and slightly richer sound. Now on hybrid SACD for the first time, and du Pré deserves it. ★★★★

May round-up

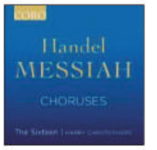
In 1967, the year newlyweds Jacqueline du Pré and ***Daniel Barenboim*** brought the Elgar Cello Concerto to BBC TV, he formed what seemed an unlikely partnership with ***Otto Klemperer*** to record the ***Beethoven Piano Concertos***. Barenboim was still only 24, his recordings of Beethoven's sonatas making critical waves worldwide, and he built an extraordinary rapport with the famously severe 82-year-old conductor, whose authority in Beethoven was widely venerated. They had different styles, but the weight and seriousness of Klemperer's Beethoven frames Barenboim's elegant, flexible, often improvisatory approach; not a clash of styles, then, but a symbiotic assimilation that's often hugely rewarding. Like the Jacqueline du Pré set (see Archive Choice), these remastered recordings are digitally refreshed, appearing on SACD for the first time. *(Warner Classics 2173244918)* ★★★★

Béla Bartók's ballet ***The Miraculous Mandarin*** is not a pretty piece. Sex and violence, lust and entrapment, it is a sordid tale from the seedy underbelly of a bustling metropolis – and a score that brings the story to life with cinematic immediacy. Michael Gielen revels in the terrifying beauty of Bartók's ballet, and the vivid brilliance of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra's response in this 1992 Austrian Radio concert recording is horribly compelling. Three years later they were joined by Ernst Kovacic for a concert performance of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2, which feels almost classically elegant after the *Mandarin*. But Kovacic's performance has bite, and it is gritty and sinewy as well as lyrically seductive. This is a powerful pairing presented in good broadcast sound. *(Orfeo C230141)* ★★★★

BÉLA BARTÓK
MICHAEL GIELEN
ERNST KOVACIC
ORF

To follow that, here are some of the first stereo recordings of ***Jean Sibelius*** in the 1950s, framed by ***Finlandia***; conductor Vittorio Gui draws playing of remarkable intensity from the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentina in 1953. They can't compete with the Philharmonia for George Weldon three years later, but even though that's the final track, it's the earlier recording that sticks in the mind. The Helsinki University Chorus on tour in America supplies powerful Finnish voices for the Cincinnati Symphony in Sibelius's cantata ***The Origin of Fire***, and Thor Johnson conducts them in a moving account of the tone poem ***Pohjola's Daughter***. For Sibelius's String Quartet, 'Voces intimae' they've tracked down a real rarity: the Paris-based Pascal Quartet, who bring forthright immediacy, but little intimacy. A fascinating time capsule, nonetheless, and excellent remastering. *(First Hand Records FHR85)* ★★★

Handel is quite simply the master of the chorus, at least that's what The Sixteen's founder and conductor Harry Christophers thinks, and nowhere does the chorus dominate quite like Handel's most famous oratorio ***Messiah***. It's a revered staple for amateur and professional choirs of all stripes, from the massed voices of the Huddersfield Choral Society to the 19 singers in The Sixteen's own highly regarded recording. So from it, after the instrumental Symphony, here they are, all 21 choruses, end-to-end, sung with such poise, precision and radiant beauty. One or two slightly stately speeds, but what's not to like? Hallelujah! *(CORO COR16211)* ★★★★★



Andrew McGregor is the presenter of Radio 3's *Record Review*, broadcast each Saturday afternoon from 2pm-4pm

Twilight music: Stokowski continued to make great recordings well into his later years

GETTY

Unboxed

This month's round-up includes views of two great conductors and a truly incredible pianist

ICA Classics always delivers when it comes to great archive recordings and ***Leopold Stokowski, Vol. 2*** *(ICA Classics ICAB 5183)* is no different. Its six discs feature remastered reissues of three of its brilliant 'BBC Legends' releases, with the remaining discs featuring Stokowski treasures on CD for the first time. All are BBC recordings, with the 'new' items taken from broadcast recordings with the ***Philharmonia, London Symphony*** and ***BBC Symphony*** orchestras. The whole set is comprised of performances Stokowski conducted in his final decade and a half, with a 1974 Dvořák No. 9 the latest. It's a great set of stereo recordings, featuring chunky works by Beethoven, Ravel and a host of Russian composers.

Eugene Ormandy served as Stokowski's co-director at the ***Philadelphia Orchestra***, taking over full time in 1938. ***Ormandy in Philadelphia – The Complete Columbia Stereo Recordings*** *(Sony Classical 19658770042)* is a 21-disc collection featuring the Hungarian-born conductor's recordings with the orchestra for RCA Victor, captured 1936-45. Sixteen of the recordings are on CD for the very first time, including a 1941 take on Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker Suite*, originally discarded and re-recorded a few years later (both are here). Ormandy's personal connections reap treasurable recordings, too, including Rachmaninov concertos and Sibelius symphonies performed in the presence of the composers.

Rachmaninov makes an appearance on ***Martha Argerich – The Warner Classics Edition*** *(Warner Classics 2173240888)*, a 46-disc collection charting the recorded career of this great artist of the piano keyboard. ***Argerich***'s relationship with the label stretches right back to her win at the International Chopin Competition in 1965, and her first album from that year kicks things off. This is a thrillingly varied selection of works spanning some 300 years – from Bach to Bacalov – and the first half of the set is comprised of albums (studio and live) recorded 1965-2020. That is followed by 22 discs of performances from the Lugano Festival, captured 2002-16. There aren't enough superlatives for Argerich's career and it would be difficult to bottle even a little of her artistic mystique; this is a good start, though. ***Michael Beek***

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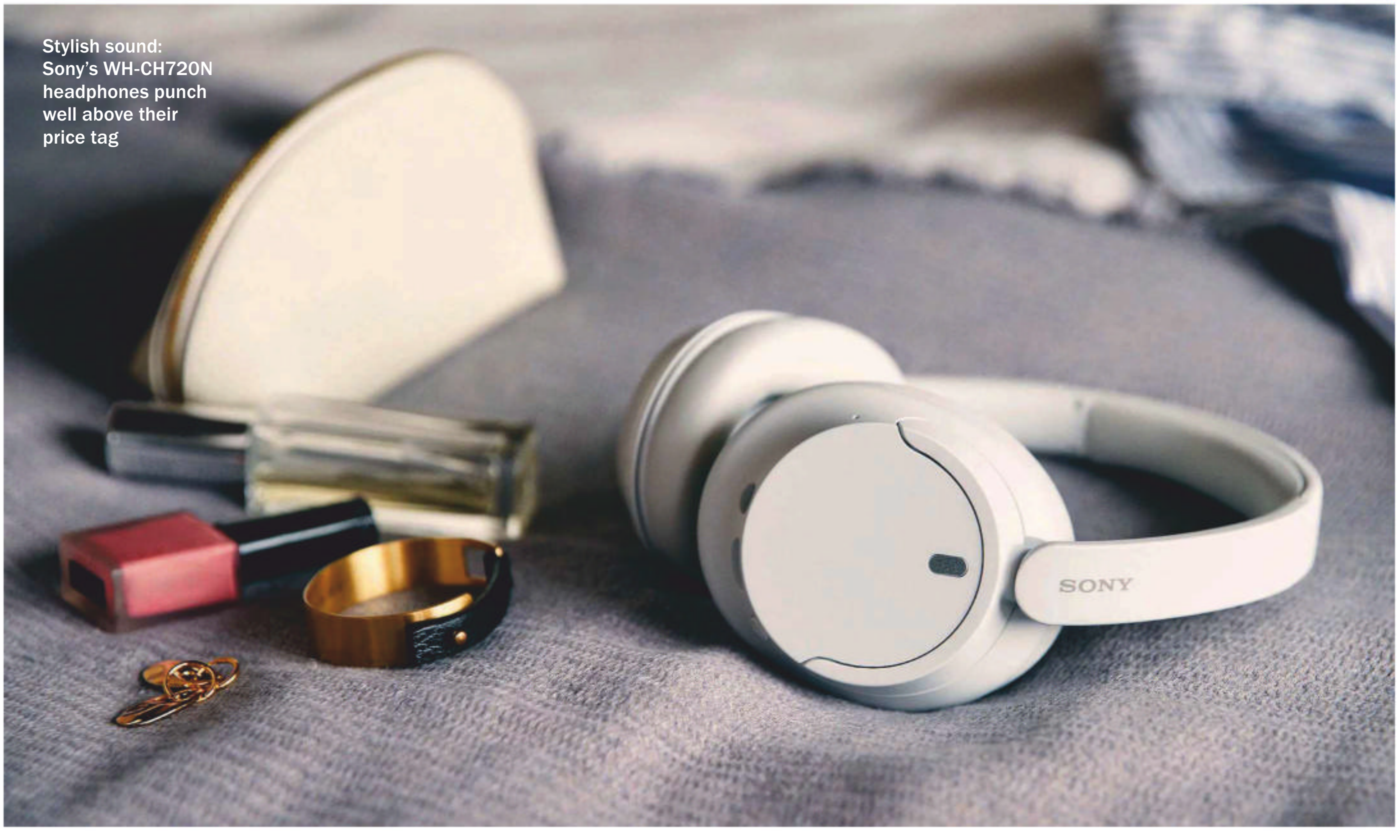
Our expert *Chris Haslam* gives advice on buying the latest hi-fi equipment

Easily affordable noise-cancelling headphones



Stylish sound: Sony's WH-CH720N headphones punch well above their price tag

It was in 1978, on a return flight from Switzerland to the US, that Dr Amar Bose had his lightbulb moment that led to the invention of active noise cancelling headphones (ANC). His first quiet-giving headphones – launched in 1989 – were designed for pilots and it took until 2000 for the first Bose QuietComfort model to become available. But it was worth the wait.

To recap, active noise cancellation (ANC) headphones feature microphones that analyse the sound coming towards your ears and play the opposite phase of that sound through the headphones, cancelling out the background noise – the best designs can be eerily quiet, even on a very noisy train or plane. The headphone industry has evolved beyond recognition today, but for ANC, what started out as technology aimed at the well-heeled traveller is now available for all, with great-sounding, noise-cancelling wireless headphones that can be bought for less than £100.

As someone lucky enough to listen to the best headphones, I have been surprised by the quality of these bargains. Take Sony, for instance. I am a huge fan of the class-leading WH-1000XM5 at £279, but also have absolutely no problem recommending the Sony WH-CH720N, which cost £200 less. No, they don't have the flawless audio presentation or the same level of luxury as their pricier siblings, but they sound terrific, have a long battery life and the noise cancelling is spot on.

> What started out as technology aimed at the well-heeled is now available for all

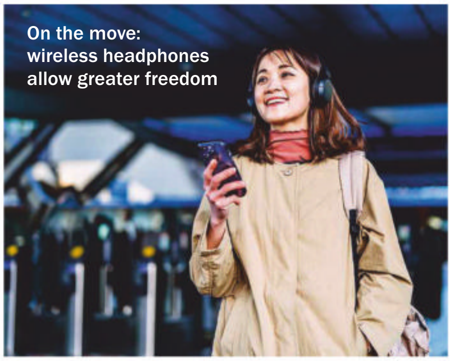
There is a fine line between cheap and cheerful and genuine value, and a quick visit to Amazon will show you hundreds of options from random brands with options costing as little as £30. Personally, I would keep clear of the cheapest options and be wary of heavily discounted options from unknown brands. Established brands such as Sony, Panasonic, Audio Technica and Soundcore are usually safe bets, but there are compromises to be made with lower-cost options. Build quality can feel plastic and the hinges and folding mechanisms can rattle compared to those using metal (though they're often lighter, which can make them more comfortable). You also might not get a travel case or spare audio cables. If you plan on plugging into any inflight entertainment, make sure your headphones can be used wired, as many cheap options only offer Bluetooth.

Even on some higher priced pairs, noise cancellation can degrade audio quality, and this can be exacerbated with lower-priced designs. You might hear a high-frequency background hiss when you turn on ANC mode, which can be distracting, but in my experience, not as annoying as engine noise or hubbub. Cheaper

Colourful choice: the WH-CH720Ns come in blue, white or black

options may not come with smartphone app connectivity – which I personally wouldn't worry about – although the ability to tweak the level of noise cancelling can be beneficial.

Audio quality can take a hit, again, compared to those options double the price, but I've been entertained by the options I've tested recently. The combination of passive noise isolation (earcups covering your ears, blocking out sound) and ANC means you can listen at lower volume too, allowing you to concentrate on the performance rather than blasting a concerto just to cover the sounds of the crying toddler in the next row. Manage your expectations and you can find great-sounding active noise cancelling headphones that sound good, dull the background noise and leave you significantly better off.



On the move: wireless headphones allow greater freedom

What to look for

Wireless connectivity: Wireless headphones have improved enormously in recent years, and with the right streaming platform (Qobuz, Tidal) you can now enjoy your favourite music in better-than-CD quality. The latest version is Bluetooth 5.4, but 5.2 and above is fine, although at lower price points very high-quality playback might actually sound worse through budget drivers.

Battery: Bluetooth streaming and ANC can burn through batteries, but even lower-priced designs can last for days. The Soundcore Q30 can manage 44 hours' continuous playback.

Extras: Folding designs take up much less space, and cases help you avoid bumps and scratches, but with lower-priced designs the inclusion of audio cables is definitely worth seeking out if you're a regular traveller.

GETTY

We recommend...

Top performers: Panasonic RB-M600B; (below) Soundcore Q30; (bottom) Jlab Go Lux ANC

Soundcore Q30 £79

While the retail price for these headphones is £79.99, if you Google carefully you can often find them for as little as £45.99. Impressively, they're well worth paying full price for as they offer sound quality that genuinely surprised me and flummoxed an audiophile friend who, in a blind listen, guessed they cost £150+. The noise cancellation is also impressive, with three different options for airplane noise, offices and traffic/wind, although I rarely deviated from the airplane option as it was highly effective. Battery life is a very respectable 50 hours, and a quick five-minute charge can give you an extra four hours, plus there's a 3.5mm cable for wired connectivity. They also come with a solid case and folding space-saving design, plus memory-foam ear cups that are plush. A true bargain. **soundcore.com**

Panasonic RB-M600B £80

With a battery that can last long enough to circumnavigate the planet (65 hours), these attractive headphones from Panasonic are ideal for the forgetful and frugal traveller. Bluetooth 5.3 means the range is excellent, and you can connect to multiple devices for convenience. There's a cable for wired listening too, and while not the last word in sonic finesse, the 30mm drivers offer an enjoyable listen with plenty of low end. At 256g, I found them comfortable to wear for extended periods. The ANC is good enough to let you focus on the music, not the hubbub around you, but the build quality does feel plasticky – hardly surprising at this price. Other small things to note: the buttons aren't the easiest to press while wearing them and there's no case for protection. But these are only minor grumbles. **panasonic.com**

Jlab Go Lux ANC £49

Early JLab headphones often lacked build quality and audio performance, but things have changed significantly and if you've got no more than £50, this feature-packed pair is easy to recommend. Unusually for ANC headphones, they are on-ear, not over-ear, which makes them compact and great for smaller heads (and bags). And despite noise isolation not being as good, the active noise cancellation tech works delightfully. There's no wired option, sadly, but they have a pass-through setting that allows you to hear more ambient noise, great when you need to be more aware of your surroundings. Battery life is a whopping 70 hours, there's an app if you want to tweak the sound profile and connectivity is easy too. As for audio, performance is sprightly, and while things get a little confused through the mid-range, bass is clear and vocals surprisingly well balanced. **jlab.com**

TV&Radio

Your guide to what's on BBC Radio 3 this month, plus TV highlights

MAY'S RADIO 3 LISTINGS

Schedules may be subject to alteration. For up-to-date listings see BBC Sounds and iPlayer

Three to look out for

Mentor memories: Benjamin Appl celebrates Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

***Sam Jackson**, the controller of BBC Radio 3, selects three programme highlights for the month of May*

Top Brass

Composer and broadcaster Hannah Peel – a trombonist herself – draws a map of brass banding, exploring lesser-known locations where ensembles are thriving and gathering recommendations from players, conductors and the community.
Brass Banding with Hannah Peel, Sundays, 8pm

VE Day: 80 Years On

Radio 3 marks the anniversary in style: in *Books for Brighter Blackouts*, Emma Smith tells five stories about how WWII transformed British books and reading; there's a speical archive Radio 3 In Concert; and *Friday Night is Music Night* features the Central Band of the Royal Air Force and BBC Concert Orchestra in tunes including 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square' and 'I'll be Seeing You'.
Monday 5 May to Friday 9 May

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau at 100

Benjamin Appl presents a personal centenary tribute to the lyric baritone and conductor – his mentor and friend (see p43) – by delving into unpublished letters and diaries, and talking to some of those who knew him best to shed light on his enduring legacy beyond the world of German art song.
Sunday Feature, Sunday 25 May, 7.15pm

1 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-4pm **Classical Live**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week** Jacquet de La Guerre
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
7.30-9.45pm **Radio 3 In Concert** live from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Holst *Capriccio*, Stravinsky *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, James MacMillan *Where the Lugar meets the Glaisnock*, Vaughan Williams *In the Fen Country*, Stravinsky *Symphony in Three Movements*. David Childs (euphonium), BBC NOW/James MacMillan
9.45-10pm **The Essay**
10-11.30pm **Night Tracks**

2 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-4pm **Classical Live**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week** Jacquet de La Guerre
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
7.30-9.45pm **Friday Night is Music Night**
9.45-10pm **The Essay**
10-11.30pm **Late Junction**

3 SATURDAY

6.30-9am **Saturday Breakfast**
9am-12noon **Saturday Morning**
12-1pm **Earlier... with Jools Holland**
1-2pm **Music Matters** Harmony in Neurodivergence
2-4pm **Record Review**
4-5pm **Sound of Cinema**
5-6pm **This Classical Life**
6-9.30pm **Opera on 3**
9.30-10.30pm **Music Planet**
10.30pm-12.30am **New Music Show**

4 SUNDAY

6.30-9am **Sunday Breakfast**
9am-12pm **Sunday Morning**
12-1.30pm **Private Passions**
1.30-3pm **Music Map**
3-4pm **Choral Evensong**
4-5pm **Jazz Record Requests**
5-6pm **The Early Music Show**
6-7.15pm **Words and Music**
7.15-8pm **Sunday Feature** The Politics of Beethoven
CHOICE 8-9pm **Brass Banding**
9-10pm **20th Century Radicals**
10-11.30pm **Ultimate Calm**

5 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-2pm **Live from Wigmore Hall**
2-4pm **Classical Live**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week** Elgar
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
CHOICE 7.30-9.45pm **Radio 3 In Concert** VE Day Special
CHOICE 9.45-10pm **The Essay** Books for Brighter Blackouts
10-11.30pm **Night Tracks**

6 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-4pm **Classical Live**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week** Elgar
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
7.30-9.45pm **Radio 3 In Concert** from Barbican, London. Mozart *The Magic Flute Overture*, Brahms *Hungarian Dances*, Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, Gershwin *Porgy and Bess Fantasie*, Ravel *La Valse*. Khatia Buniatishvili (piano), Gvantsa Buniatishvili (piano)
CHOICE 9.45-10pm **The Essay** Books for Brighter Blackouts
10-11.30pm **Night Tracks**

7 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-3pm **Classical Live**
3-4pm **Choral Evensong**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week**
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
7.30-9.45pm **Radio 3 In Concert** from Barbican, London. Beethoven *Egmont Overture*, Beethoven *Piano Concerto No. 3*, Mahler *Symphony No. 1*. Stephen Hough (piano), BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sakari Oramo
CHOICE 9.45-10pm **The Essay** Books for Brighter Blackouts
10-11.30pm **Night Tracks**

8 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am **Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm **Essential Classics**
1-4pm **Classical Live**
4-5pm **Composer of the Week** Elgar
5-7pm **In Tune**
7-7.30pm **Classical Mixtape**
7.30-9.45pm **Radio 3 In Concert** from City Halls, Glasgow. Ferro *New Work*, Pintscher *Neharot*, Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto No. 4*, Schoenberg *Pelleas und Melisande*. Denis Kozhukhin

On the slide: trombonist Hannah Peel explores the UK's brass banding scene

UWE ARENS, ALAMY

(piano), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Matthias Pintscher

CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Books for Brighter Blackouts

10-11.30pm Night Tracks

9 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-4pm Classical Live

4-5pm Composer of the Week Elgar

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

CHOICE 7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night

CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Books for Brighter Blackouts

10-11.30pm Late Junction

10 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast

9am-12noon Saturday Morning

12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland

1-2pm Music Matters Harmony in Neurodivergence

2-4pm Record Review

4-5pm Sound of Cinema

5-6pm This Classical Life

6-9.30pm Opera on 3

9.30-10.30pm Music Planet

10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

11 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast

9am-12pm Sunday Morning

12-1.30pm Private Passions

1.30-3pm Music Map

3-4pm Choral Evensong

4-5pm Jazz Record Requests

5-6pm The Early Music Show

6-7.15pm Words and Music

7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Gothic Series: Edward Gorey at 100

CHOICE 8-9pm Brass Banding

9-10pm 20th Century Radicals

10-11.30pm Ultimate Calm

12 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall

2-4pm Classical Live

4-5pm Composer of the Week Bruch

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Walker *Sinfonia No. 5 'Visions'*, Bernstein *Serenade (after Plato's Symposium)*, Walton *Symphony No. 1*. Carolin Widmann (violin), London Symphony Orchestra/Antonio Pappano

9.45-10pm The Essay The Song Detectorists

10-11.30pm Night Tracks

13 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-4pm Classical Live

4-5pm Composer of the Week Bruch

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Britten *Sinfonia da Requiem*, Mahler *Symphony No. 9*. BBC Philharmonic/Mark Wigglesworth

9.45-10pm The Essay The Song Detectorists

10-11.30pm Night Tracks

14 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-3pm Classical Live

3-4pm Choral Evensong

4-5pm Composer of the Week Bruch

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. Beethoven *Piano Sonata in C minor Op. 10 No. 1*, Mozart *Piano Sonata in C K330*, Brahms *3 Intermezzi Op. 117*, Beethoven *Piano Sonata in C minor Op. 111*. Paul Lewis (piano)

9.45-10pm The Essay The Song Detectorists

10-11.30pm Night Tracks

15 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-4pm Classical Live

4-5pm Composer of the Week Bruch

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from City Halls, Glasgow. Lera Auerbach *Icarus*, Shostakovich *Violin Concerto*, Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 5*. BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Gemma New

9.45-10pm The Essay The Song Detectorists

10-11.30pm Night Tracks

16 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-4pm Classical Live

4-5pm Composer of the Week Bruch

5-7pm In Tune

7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape

7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night

9.45-10pm The Essay The Song Detectorists

10-11.30pm Late Junction

17 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast

9am-12noon Saturday Morning

12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland

1-2pm Music Matters Harmony in Neurodivergence

2-4pm Record Review

4-5pm Sound of Cinema

5-6pm This Classical Life

6-9.30pm Opera on 3

9.30-10.30pm Music Planet

10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

18 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast

9am-12pm Sunday Morning

12-1.30pm Private Passions

1.30-3pm Music Map

3-4pm Choral Evensong

4-5pm Jazz Record Requests

5-6pm The Early Music Show

6-7.15pm Words and Music

7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Gothic Series: Queer Gothic

CHOICE 8-9pm Brass Banding

9-10pm 20th Century Radicals

10-11pm Ultimate Calm

11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mixtape

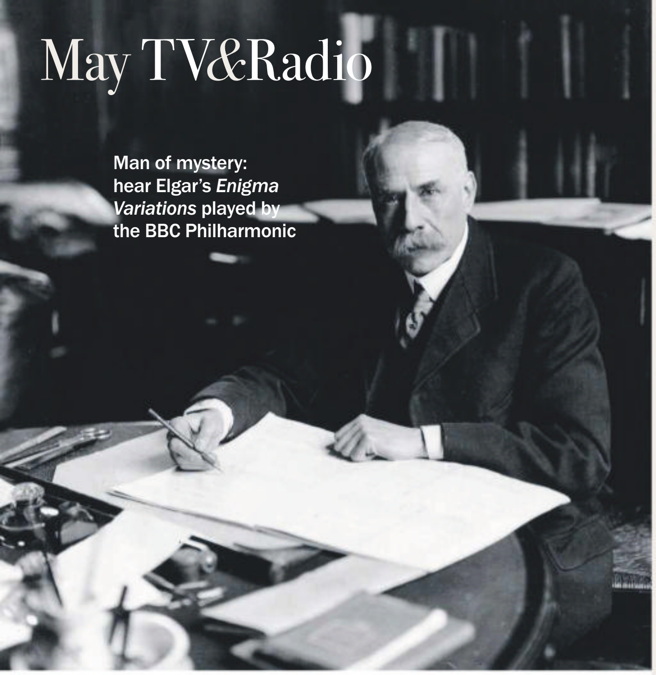
19 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast

9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall

May TV&Radio



Man of mystery: hear Elgar's *Enigma Variations* played by the BBC Philharmonic

GETTY

TV CHOICE

Inside Classical: Elgar's *Enigma Variations*

Experience the BBC Philharmonic up-close in a vibrant performance from Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, including one of the best-loved pieces in British music. Elgar's intriguing set of musical portraits of his nearest and dearest showcases his love for ciphers and riddles – famously he hid one within the score, which is still to be conclusively solved – and brims with great tunes, including the monumental 'Nimrod'. All the works in the programme are introduced by baritone Roderick Williams, who himself performs *Six Monologues from Everyman*, a song cycle by Frank Martin. Arvo Pärt's *Swansong* provides a ruminative palate cleanser before the world premiere of Geoffrey Gordon's bassoon concerto *Anima Mia*, inspired and performed here by the orchestra's principal bassoon, Roberto Giaccaglia.

BBC iPlayer, available now

2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Janáček
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. Shostakovich *Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op.67*, Messiaen *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. Alina Ibragimova (violin), Marie-Elisabeth Hecker (cello), Matthew Hunt (clarinet), Cédric Tiberghien (piano)
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

20 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Janáček
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Boulanger *Psaume 130 'Du fond de l'abîme'*, James MacMillan *Three Interludes from 'The Sacrifice'*, Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet* (excerpts). BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC Symphony Orchestra/Dima Slobodeniouk
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

21 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Janáček
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Wigmore Hall, London. Vivaldi *The Four Seasons; La fida ninfa: Alma oppressa da sorte crudele*, Anon *Si la gondola avere no crie; L'ocasion de le mie pene; In fin che'l tempo è bello; Semplicetta è la farfalle; Chi no ga la borsa grossa; Co' Checca, Betta e Catte.* Avi Avital (mandolin), Núria Rial (soprano), Venice Baroque Orchestra
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

22 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Janáček
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Beethoven *Symphony No. 1*, Abrahamsen *Horn Concerto*, Beethoven *Zu Namesfeier Overture*, Sibelius *Symphony No. 5*. Stefan Dohr (horn), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Ryan Wigglesworth
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

23 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Janáček
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction

24 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters Harmony in Neurodivergence
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

25 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
CHOICE 7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Fischer-Dieskau Behind the Words
CHOICE 8-9pm Brass Banding
9-10pm 20th Century Radicals
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mixtape

26 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Beethoven
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Wigmore Hall, London. Haydn *Piano Sonata in B minor HXVI/32; Piano Sonata in D HXVI/24*, Mozart *Rondo in A minor K511*, Brahms *6 Klavierstücke Op. 118; 4 Klavierstücke Op.119;* Mozart Piano *Sonata in D K576.* Richard Goode (piano)
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

27 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Beethoven
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Schreker *Kammersymphonie*, Mahler *Das Lied von der Erde.* Alice Coote (soprano), David Butt Philip (tenor), BBC Symphony Orchestra/Mark Elder
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

28 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Beethoven
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Huw Watkins *Concerto for Orchestra*, Richard Strauss *An Alpine Symphony.* Hallé/Mark Elder
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

29 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Beethoven
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Mozart *Le nozze di Figaro Overture*, Widmann *Violin Concerto No. 2*, Felix Mendelssohn *Symphony No. 5 'Reformation'*. Carolin Widmann (violin), BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Jörg Widmann
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks

30 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Beethoven
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction

31 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters Music on the Front Line
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

QUIZ ANSWERS from p 144
1. Johann Sebastian Bach
2. Thomas Hardy
3. a) Vincenzo Bellini; b) Jake Heggie
4. Lord Byron
5. George Gershwin
6. *Andante*
7. Johannes Brahms
8. Delius's *A Village Romeo and Juliet*
9. French and Saunders (conducted by Carl Davis)
10. a) *Me and My Girl*; b) *Carousel*

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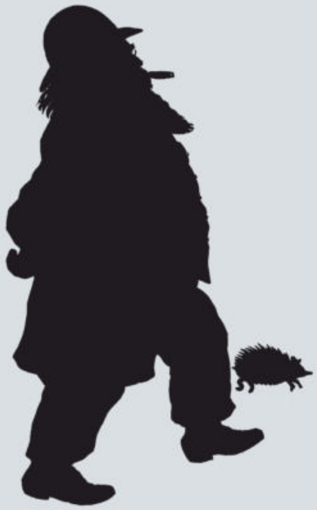


THE QUIZ

This month's ten questions should be a walk in the park...

1. In 1705, which composer walked 250 miles to the city of Lübeck to hear the organist and composer Dieterich Buxtehude play?

2. And to which author's Dorset house did Gustav Holst walk from Cheltenham for inspiration for his tone poem *Egdon Heath*?

3. Who composed the following operas: a) *La sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker; 1831); b) *Dead Man Walking* (2000)?

4. Berlioz said that his *Harold in Italy* for viola and orchestra was inspired by 'my wanderings in the Abruzzi' and by which poet's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*?

5. Who composed the orchestral piece *Walking the Dog (Promenade)* for the 1937 Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers film *Shall We Dance*?

6. Which Italian tempo marking is often loosely translated in English as 'at a walking pace'?

7. In the above silhouette by Otto Böhler, which composer is seen ambling over to the Red Hedgehog, his favourite coffee house?

8. Often performed as a concert piece, 'The Walk to the Paradise Garden' is an orchestral interlude from which 1907 opera?

9. In 1990, the eminent mezzo-soprano Sarah Walker appeared on TV to sing Kylie Minogue's 'I should be so lucky' with which well-known comedy duo?

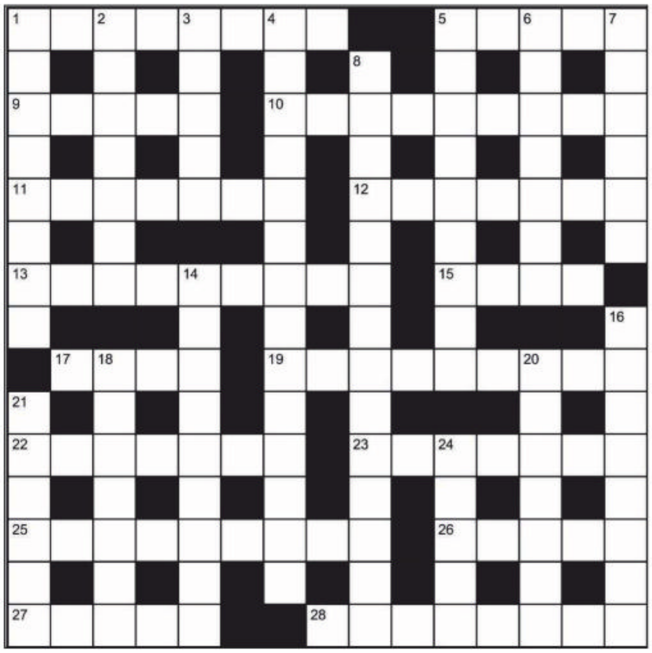
10. In which musicals did these famous songs first appear: a) 'The Lambeth Walk' (1937); b) 'You'll never walk alone?' (1945)?

See p142 for answers

The *BBC Music Magazine* PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 411

Crossword set by **Paul Henderson**

The first correct solution of our crossword picked at random will win an exclusive **BBC Music Magazine Coffee Mug** (not available to purchase). To enter, send answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 411/ May 2025, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 15 May 2025 (solution in August 2025 issue).



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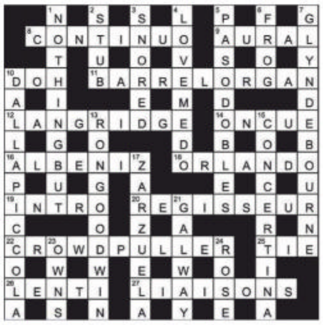
FEBRUARY SOLUTION
No. 408



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FEBRUARY WINNER

Liz Ellan, Sunderland

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ACROSS

1 Fellow and Ann mostly attempt Spanish dance (8)
5 Mostly get away with piano piece (5)
9 Chamber group nobody's seen before end of concert (5)
10 Arrangement of sea (Braque) for part of ballet (9)
11/12 Italian composer or Italian noise, possibly (7,7)
13 Landing Wagner cycle? Act up badly beforehand (9)
15 Singer showing some natural tone (4)
17 Hungarian maestro having no time for individual showpieces (4)
19 Unfavourably miscast? (2,3,4)
22 Power to secure time for music, perhaps (3,4)
23 Notes for Pleyel only including F, E and G? (7)
25 Leader of musicians some soon replaced? Not so fast (4,5)
26 Opera's interruption? Company's expression of displeasure (5)
27/28 Composer impacted only on readers (5,8)

DOWN

1 Enthusiast attending contralto in some European entertainment of risqué nature (3,5)
2 Moto perpetuo number, new work involving soprano and tenor (3-4)
3 Name not recorded around end of motet – could it be Bruckner? (5)
4 Unexpectedly Callas gig omits work by Janáček (10,4)
5 End with beats distributed around large collection of metal drums (5,4)
6 Submission to radio programme regarding inquiry (7)
7 US composer-conductor having piano volume in control (6)
8 Old wind instrument operation encompassed by a baritone, captured by war poet (7-7)
14 As crotchets should be played? Four in my line, possibly (9)
16 Stage accommodating Right Honourable MP in *Iolanthe*? (8)
18 More frequently using left piano pedal, say, though not originally (7)
20 Approaches while circling locations for concert? (7)
21 Frenchman probing concern over liberal origin of Poulenc's nuns? (6)
24 Irish tenor all but shut up (5)

Please note: Because of *BBC Music Magazine*'s limited office access, there may be a delay in receiving your prize. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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GETTY, ANDY STAPLES

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Volume 33 No.8 *BBC Music Magazine* (ISSN 0966-7180) (USPS 018-168) is published 13 times a year by Our Media Ltd under licence from BBC Worldwide, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST, UK.
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Distributed in the US by NPS Media Group, 74 Winthrop St, Suite #6, Augusta, ME 04330. Periodicals postage paid at Augusta, ME and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC MUSIC, Immediate Media PO Box 401 Williamsport, PA 17703

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Music that changed me

Sian Williams

Broadcaster, author, psychologist

Sian Williams's 40-year career in TV and radio news included waking the nation on *BBC Breakfast* for over a decade. These days, she splits her time between broadcasting and working as a counselling psychologist, specialising in anxiety, stress and trauma. She can be heard on *Classical Unwind* each morning on Radio 3 Unwind and on Radio 4's popular series *Life Changing*.

We know that there are physical processes going on in our body and in our brain when we listen to music. It stimulates the reward centre of our brain – called the *nucleus accumbens* – especially when it's bittersweet, nostalgic or has an emotional connection. My Grandad (or 'Taid' in Welsh) lived in a vicarage in Oswestry on the Wales-England border. He was a Presbyterian minister and organist, a brilliant (and published) poet and a lover of music. The house was very simple, but he saved up his money and bought a baby grand piano, which had pride of place. He also had a bust of Chopin and played religiously; that's when I first understood that music that could move you.

He had enormous amounts of patience, love and goodness, and he used to sit with me at his piano. The first thing I remember feeling an emotional connection with was **BEETHOVEN**'s 'Moonlight' Sonata. He used to play the first movement and get my tiny hands and move them across the keys. I will always connect that piece of music with time spent with a good man. I can remember the smell of his pipe smoke and his scratchy tweed jacket, him giving me time and showing me what he loved.

We turn to music to help us experience so many different emotions, because we perhaps can't talk about it, or want to be uplifted and experience joy. I often turn to **MAX RICHTER** when there's a feeling of difficulty. I remember playing *On the Nature of Daylight* when one of my very good friends was very ill; it was one of his favourite tunes. I listened to it on repeat and then it was played at his funeral. The thing I love about that piece is that it takes some time for the light to come in, and that makes me think about times when people I love have been struggling, or I've been struggling, and you're wondering when the light will come back. And it always does: there is always hope and the daylight will always return. In this piece, it takes almost two minutes before the highest strings come in. It really feels as though the sun is rising, that whatever the difficulties of yesterday, there is solace and hope to be found in that light.

GETTY

'We sometimes turn to music to help us experience emotions we can't express'

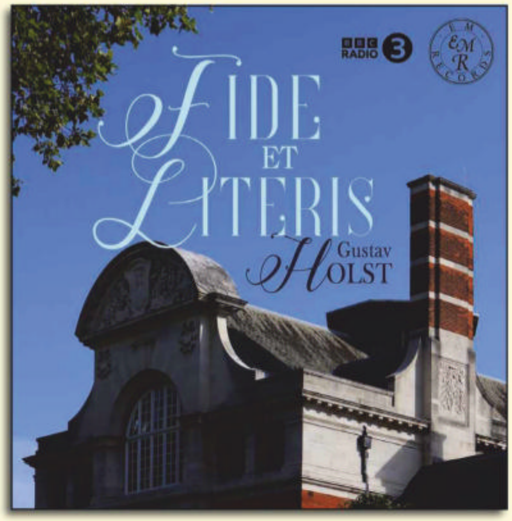
My dad was in choirs and used to sing Handel's *Messiah*. He had a lovely bass voice. Another tune I turn to is a Welsh hymn called **CALON LÂN**, which was my dad's favourite. When he was in the hospice and couldn't talk any more, he wanted to listen to Welsh hymns – this was one that he wanted to hear a lot, sung by Cerys Matthews and the Fron Male Voice Choir. It's about land and people, community and coming together, and not needing fine pearls or riches when a pure heart will do. To hear Cerys's voice echoing that purity just does something to you.

I like **RACHMANINOV**, and his Piano Concerto No. 3 is my favourite because it's got that amazing scale; it's a massive tune but it starts with this little melody. You think, 'This is nice,' and then about eight minutes in it goes 'WHOOSH! Have some of this!' I saw Lang Lang at the BBC Proms in 2001 when he was still a teenager. I don't think many people had seen him play before. He was so young, yet tackling this fearsome Rachmaninov; his eyes were closed, and he was just immersed in the music. There was rapturous applause at the end. It was phenomenal.

I get to hear lots of great new music doing *Classical Unwind*. One composer I was introduced to on the programme was **ANNA CLYNE**. She did a beautiful album called *Dance*, based on a Rumi poem. It's about struggle, taking solace in your own interpretation and finding your own strength in difficulty: 'Dance when you're broken open, Dance if you've torn the bandage off, Dance in the middle of the fighting, Dance in your blood, Dance when you're perfectly free...' I wrote a book about recovery after adversity, after I'd had a breast cancer experience; I wanted to know more about how you recover well. That's what I do now as a psychologist; I work in the NHS with people who are trying to get from one place to another, and I think a poem like that, and the way she has articulated it with the London Philharmonic, is so beautiful. 'Dance in the middle of the fighting' is my favourite one, and I think because the cello so beautifully echoes the human voice, it feels like somebody is saying it to you, 'When things are at their worst, just dance...' It's about finding hope in the middle of struggle; I guess that's what I do.

Interview by Michael Beek

EM RECORDS



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Em Marshall-Luck (reciter)

PRAYER
THE SONGS OF MORTEN LAURIDSEN
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PAULA FAN

EMR CD089

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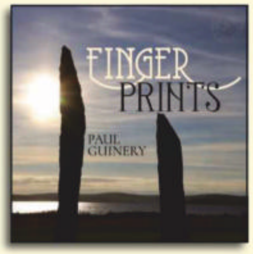
Jeremy Huw Williams (baritone)
Paula Fan (piano)



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